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May 27, 2022

Clackamas River Ranger District
Attn: Draft Danger Tree EA
16400 Champion Way
Sandy, OR 97055

BlueRibbon Coalition/ShareTrails (BRC) is writing to provide feedback for the Clackamas Fires Roadside Danger Tree Assessment. BRC is a national non-profit organization that champions responsible recreation and encourages a strong conservation ethic and individual stewardship. We champion responsible use of public lands and waters for the benefit of all recreationists by educating and empowering our members to secure, protect, and expand shared outdoor recreation access and use by working collaboratively with natural resource managers and other recreationists. Our members use motorized and non-motorized means of recreation, including OHVs, horses, mountain bikes, and hiking to enjoy federally managed lands throughout the United States, including those of the Forest Service. Many of our members and supporters live in Oregon or travel across the country to visit Oregon and use motorized vehicles to access Forest Service managed lands throughout the state. BRC members visit the Clackamas area for motorized recreation, sightseeing, photography, hunting, wildlife and nature study, camping, water sports, and other similar pursuits. We would like to add our support to any comment submitted by any other individuals or organizations including Cal4Wheel, that advocate for motorized use and increased recreation access overall. BRC members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in the future.

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We support any additional comments that encourage the Forest Service to designate the maximum number of routes in this area as open. Many of our members are individuals and organizations with extensive on-the-ground experience in the Clackamas area. If any route or area specific comments are made which identify missing routes or errors in the maps that lead to restricted access, we support Forest Service addressing these comments in the development of an alternative that maximizes motorized recreation access to the planning area.

General Comments

We support any additional comments that encourage the USFS to designate the maximum number of routes in this area as open. Many of our members are organizations with extensive on-the-ground experience. If any route or area specific comments are made which identify missing routes or errors in maps that lead to restricted access, we support USFS addressing these comments to maximize motorized recreation access to the planning area.

Closure of 27 miles of “low-use” roads seems excessive as “low-use” is not defined and any closure and decommissioning should be done through the travel management process. 13 miles of roads are already approved for closure therefore there is not a need for more closures. There is a purpose and need for these roads because they do have use and the USFS should analyze these miles further before closure. BRC is also concerned with the proposed decommissioning of 9.4 miles of “potentially unneeded roads”. This is an arbitrary statement as discussed previously there is a purpose and need for these roads. There is a purpose and need for more roads in the system to maintain the health and vitality of the forest. The areas with these miles of road should be treated to prevent dangerous trees falling along the roads. The EA states comments were received encouraging the Forest Service to not treat these “not likely needed” roads. However, we submitted comments encouraging the continued use of these roads.

Forest fire is the greatest risk to wildlife and habitat therefore better access to treat the forests will help protect habitat and wildlife. Not only will roads help in achieving better vegetation management but roads also act as a natural fire barrier as well as provide access for emergency response teams. Although no new roads are proposed through this project, BRC recommends analyzing the purpose and need for increasing the amount of system roads.

The plan states a possible method to use is prescribed burns. If this method is chosen for an area, and a wildfire arises at any point within the same area authorized for prescribed burn, that wildfire should be treated as such and the FS should not allow the wildfire to burn in order to meet prescribed burn objectives. This involves a lot of risks and wildfires should always be

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treated with as much urgency to suppress the fire as possible.

Wildfire

BRC supports the broad project objectives to keep forests healthy and reduce the risk of wildland fires. We recommend using commercial treatment in the maximum amount of land possible. Best available science should be used in making these decisions. Past forest fires that have burned rampant because of the lack of forest projects should be looked at when making decisions.

Roads and Trails

BRC commends the USFS in their efforts to have a sustainable and healthy forest for all to use while improving access and roads in the system. Oftentimes we see vegetation projects used as a method to close or decommission roads and we believe removing hazardous trees are necessary for the safety as well as health of the forest. Forest salvation projects are crucial for the safety of the forest.

Economic Benefits

Roads are crucial for various reasons, not only do they act as a natural wildfire barrier to help protect the forests and protect wildlife and habitat but are also needed for fire treatments and emergency response teams. The Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that in 2019 outdoor recreation brought in \$459.8 billion. Outdoor recreation has only grown in popularity since then. BRC wants to ensure that salvage projects move forward to protect roads in the forest system.

Not only will the proposed projects benefit the economy by providing a conducive environment for outdoor recreation but will also bring in local revenue. BRC supports these efforts and supports any comments made by locals and members who approve these projects for local economic benefit.

Users with Disabilities

We recommend that the USFS use this planning process to finally begin to reverse its decades-long systematic discrimination against those with mobility impairment-related disabilities. In April 2022 the Department of Interior released its Equity Action Plan which states, "Public land visitation data collected from the Department's bureaus suggests that

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certain underserved communities are underrepresented as public land visitors, relative to their presence in the U.S. population at large.” This includes persons with disabilities and limited physical access. This project proposal will help increase access within this area and is a positive step in the right direction.

On his first day in office, President Joe Biden issued an “Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.” This executive order established “an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda” which focuses on addressing “entrenched disparities in our laws and public policies,” and mandates a “comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”

Under this executive order, “The term ‘equity’ means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as ... persons with disabilities....” Historically, there has been no group more greatly marginalized and excluded by public land management policies, and motorized travel management policies in particular, than people with disabilities. Outdoor enthusiasts with ambulatory disabilities frequently rely on motorized travel as their sole means to enjoy recreating on public lands. Not everyone has the ability to hike into a remote wilderness area, but many such people are still able to drive Jeeps, side-by-sides, and ATVs, which are restricted to the designated motorized route network.

Management policies focused on “minimizing” the environmental impacts of motorized recreation have resulted in a dramatic decrease in motorized recreation opportunities on public lands over the last 20 years which has disproportionately impacted people with disabilities. Wilderness focused environmental groups with extreme ableist biases have pushed for more and more areas to be closed to motorized recreation and reserved exclusively for hikers, mountain bikers, and other “human powered” and “quiet use” forms of recreation in which many people with disabilities are unable to participate.

Every time motorized routes or areas are closed, people with disabilities that require the use of motorized means to access public lands are barred from those areas forever. There has been little recourse for such people in the past because the Americans With Disabilities Act does not require public land management agencies to consider disproportionate effects on the disabled

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community, but only requires that they be given access to public lands on equal terms with everyone else. As a result, the USFS has historically failed to give any real consideration to the impacts of motorized route closures on the disabled community when developing travel management plans.

The Biden Administration's focus on equity, however, changes the equation. While the ADA focuses only on equality of opportunity, equity inherently focuses on equality of outcome. Any policy that is facially neutral but disproportionately harms a disadvantaged or marginalized group is considered inequitable. The USFS is therefore required by this executive order and others mandating that federal agencies consider "environmental justice" in NEPA proceedings to consider whether any route closures in the Clackamas plan would disproportionately harm disabled users' ability to access public lands.

Any approach to travel management that presumes the superiority of non-motorized forms of recreation like hiking over motorized recreation, or that justifies closing motorized access on the basis that people can still hike on those routes, is inherently discriminatory toward people with disabilities. Any large-scale closures of existing routes would unfairly and inequitably deprive people with disabilities of the ability to recreate in the area using the only means available to them. It is imperative that the USFS consider the access needs of disabled users in drafting the alternatives for this travel plan and ensure that people with disabilities who depend on motorized means do not lose access.

Conclusion

We would like to close by saying we support "shared use". As long as overall visitation numbers are appropriate for the affected resources, motorized and non-motorized users can be compatible with one another so long as individual users understand designations and plan their activities accordingly. Indeed, motorized and nonmotorized recreation use often overlap as OHV's often increase accessibility to non-motorized recreational activities such as hiking, camping, equestrian use, etc. We also hold that responsible recreational use of public lands can exist in harmony with ecosystem needs.

BRC would like to be considered an interested public for this project. Information can be sent to the following address and email address:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of stylized initials 'B' and 'B' followed by a long horizontal line.

Ben Burr
Executive Director
BlueRibbon Coalition

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Simone Griffin' in a cursive script.

Simone Griffin
Policy Director
BlueRibbon Coalition