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Organization: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Title: District Wildlife Biologist  
Comments: December 10, 2021

Nikki Swanson

Sweet Home District Ranger

4431 Highway 20

Sweet Home OR, 97386

Dear Ms. Swanson:

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (department) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the Quartzville-Middle Santiam (QMS) Draft Environmental Assessment (EA). The department is charged under ORS 496.012 with the management of Oregon's fish and wildlife resources but does not have direct regulatory authority over their habitat. Therefore, the department relies on collaborative relationships with other agencies, organizations, and private landowners to manage the habitats that are critical for sustaining healthy fish and wildlife populations. In that context, the department provides the following comments and recommendations directly related to the Quartzville-Middle Santiam (QMS) Draft Environmental Assessment (EA).

The QMS project is within ODFW's Santiam Wildlife Management Unit (WMU) in Linn County, Oregon. The area is used year-round by both deer and elk. The Santiam WMU elk population is substantially below its state management population objective, as evidenced through survey data and declining hunter success rates. Santiam WMU deer populations have also declined as evidenced by both survey data and declining hunter success rates. Lack of high-quality forage on public lands is one of the primary factors in the decline of elk and deer in this unit. With early seral habitat making up only 0.01% of the QMS project Area the department thinks that it is vitally important to increase the amount of this valuable habitat within the project area. Early seral habitat is important for big game species, but these benefits also extend to migratory birds and small mammals.

The gap creation, dominant tree releases, and shelterwood with reserves will all help increase the amount of early seral habitat and thus forage for big game species on the landscape. While the gap creations of 1-3 acres will be beneficial, slightly larger gaps would increase the overall amount of early seral habitat and prolonging the length of time that it persists on the landscape.

Additionally, the thinnings in Late Successional Reserves lands should help some of these overstocked stands more quickly attain late seral characteristics. This will be beneficial to a number of wildlife species that rely late-successional forests, including Northern Spotted

Owls, Red-Tree Voles. The thinnings will also temporarily increase the available forage for big game species within these stands.

Given these reasons, the department supports Alternative 2 because it appears to be a balanced approach that improves stands in Late Successional Reserves while also increasing the amount of early seral habitat throughout the project area which will benefit deer, elk, small mammals, and migratory bird species.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important project. The department also appreciates the use

of the elk nutrition model in this Environmental Assessment and encourages its use on future landscape level restoration projects. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Greg Reed

District Wildlife Biologist

South Willamette Watershed District

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