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Comments: Regarding "Beaver Habitat Restoration"

The Carbon River Landscape Analysis (CRLA) project introduces the concept of relocating beaver into the area and creating manmade beaver habitat. Although we believe this is a minor component of the CRLA we feel compelled to comment on the subject as many people are unaware of the issue.

We are very interested in healthy beaver populations, and associated beaver habitat within the CRLA area, However we believe that this subject is most likely addressing something that is not a problem.

We believe that the USFS should wasting time and resources on issues that are not really a problem.

In summary, the issue of introducing beaver into the area should be given thoughtful consideration before implementation. There are currently beavers inhabiting the CRLA area. We are concerned with the possible introduction of various diseases that introduced beaver might be bringing into the area that the current, rather isolated beaver population, is not infected with. Also, the possibility exists, that introducing more beaver into this ecosystem currently occupied by beaver, would likely cause stress to beaver already living there under marginal nutritional conditions.

I have trapped beaver in the CRLA area on and off since the early 1970's. I can assure you that within existing beaver habitat, and former beaver habitat, beaver have done quite well, but as conifer forests mature, it is to be expected, and can be demonstrated, that beaver habitat and beaver populations within the area have and will decline over time.

Manmade "beaver dam analogues" are unnecessary. Beaver have been present within the scoping area for decades, in fact beaver are currently present in Coply Lake and in isolated areas adjacent to the mainstem of the Carbon River. If beaver habitat is present beaver will find and exploit the available habitat. Beaver populations are very healthy in western Washington and dispersing juvenile beaver are very adept at finding new areas to colonize.

The primary issue negatively effecting beaver populations within the scoping area is degrading habitat. The narrow, confined, low gradient riparian areas, and increasing conifer canopy cover are the primary issues contributing to the lack of and loss of beaver habitat in the area. Beaver utilize willow as their primary food source in these riparian areas. As these narrow areas of willow along the shorelines are consumed by beavers, beavers are forced to extend their travel further back from the waters edge and seek huckleberry brush and hemlock as a subpar food source. In addition to this poor nutrition source, as beaver stray farther from the water edge they become easy prey to predators, primarily bobcats, cougar, and coyotes.

The natural cycle is for the beaver to "die-out" in these areas, the willows then rejuvenate, and the beaver return naturally to complete the cycle. I have personally witnessed this phenomenon occurring in this area over the past 50 years.

The best way to improve beaver habitat within the CRLA area would be to remove conifer encroachment within specific areas along the shorelines of potential beaver habitat. However, current forest practices regulations do not allow for this. Perhaps conditional changes could be made to existing forest practices regulations.

Included are photos taken on July 28, 2024 of several areas of current occupied beaver colonies, and former

beaver colonies within the CRLA area.

The first photo is of a "dead" beaver pond along the south side of FSR 78. Although this pond currently has rejuvenating willows, the area around the pond precludes any expansion of additional suitable habitat. During the past few years beavers have periodically moved into this pond, but then either "die off" or vacate the pond after dam removal by road maintenance personnel. The dam the beaver created at this location has caused flooding of FSR 78.

The second photo is about 100 yards north of the concrete bridge on FSR 7810. This is a watercourse that had vibrant beaver colonies in the 1970s. This watercourse runs parallel to the Carbon River. Encroaching and maturing tree cover (both conifer and alder) has overtime, has eliminated suitable beaver habitat. This could become beaver habitat again if management practices were implemented with the objective of creating suitable beaver habitat.

The third photo is at the outlet of Coply Lake. Pictured is a beaver dam at the outlet that beaver are currently maintaining. The dam is constructed from debris, alder, and western hemlock. Notice that the alder bark has not been eaten; beaver do not consume either red alder or sitka alder bark. However, it can be seen that beaver are eating the bark from western hemlock twigs. There is no willow in the dam.

The fourth photo illustrates the absence of willow around Coply Lake. The margins of the lake do however provide good habitat for willow which will naturally re-establish themselves over time (with the absence of beaver) or willow could be replanted.

The fifth photo is of East Lake. East lake had a beaver population about 20 years ago, but as can be seen has no willow or other suitable beaver food at the present time. This would be an ideal place to replant willow. Beaver will most likely, naturally re-colonize East Lake.

The sixth photo is in the basin near the headwaters of Kennedy Creek. Beavers colonized a cedar swamp there a little less than 20 years ago. They consumed the available food source and then either died-off or vacated the colony about eight years ago. Willows have rejuvenated to the degree that the area would now provide better beaver habitat than existed prior to 20 years ago. Beaver will most likely, naturally re-colonize this area.