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Title: Conservation Director

Comments: May 22, 2025

Middle Fork Ranger District

Attn: Steeple Rock Rigdon

46375 Highway 58

Westfir, Oregon 97492

RE: Oregon Hunters Association comments on the Steeple Rock Rigdon Project Environmental Assessment

The Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) is a sportsmen's conservation organization with over 12,000 members in 26 chapters across Oregon. OHA values our National Forests as a public place to hunt and recreate, and as a valuable asset providing habitat for the wildlife we care about. As such, the management and access of these lands are of critical importance to OHA. We have been engaged in numerous projects to improve and protect habitat conditions, and we value our partnership with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Willamette National Forest. We are providing comments and input on the Steeple Rock Rigdon Project Environmental Assessment (EA).

OHA supports the proposed action identified in the EA. Much of the Willamette National Forest outside of the areas affected by high intensity wildfires are in need of proactive management to address multiple factors identified in the EA.

Specific points that OHA supports:

- * Proactive invasive species control [ndash] specifically in the meadow areas, but throughout the project area as well.

- * Recreation management [ndash] OHA supports dispersed recreation opportunities, and recognizes that there are management needs associated with dispersed recreation to reduce resource impacts and promote sustainable management.

- * Meadow Restoration [ndash] Specifically the management needs identified in the statement:[ldquo]These unique areas provide habitat essential for a wide variety of plants and animals including pollinator species and early seral dependent wildlife (such as deer and elk). Some meadows are being encroached upon by conifers and non-native invasive species, resulting in a decline in plant diversity, pollinator habitat, and wildlife forage.[rdquo]

- * Proactive stand management [ndash] while the EA points out correctly a number of needs and benefits from this project, OHA specifically supports the creation of gaps and heavy thinning prescriptions that will promote forage growth and production in the understory.

- * Transportation management [ndash] OHA supports the approach to close/decommission some roads thereby reducing overall road densities in the project area.[ldquo]Under the action alternative, road decommissioning and closures would result in a lower open road density of 2.3 miles per square mile, reducing disturbance to elk and

deer and their habitat.”]

OHA recognizes the complexities of public lands management and the diverse perspectives of Oregonians and their expectations of the forest to meet those expectations. OHA commends the district and forest for specifically identifying and taking management action to support hunting.

Hunting

“Implementation of the proposed action alternative would improve hunting opportunities in the area, commensurate with the amount of forage produced (see the Wildlife section for a detailed analysis). The proposed meadow and variable density thinning would provide high quality big game forage area, particularly for elk and deer. The proposed actions would create long-term high-quality forage habitat due to the prescription for periodic maintenance burning that would maintain the area as a grassy open forest. Maintaining or increasing big game populations would have a direct effect on increasing hunting opportunities.”]

We are very encouraged with the district’s recognition of this long standing and traditional recreational use of the forest. We are also encouraged to see the management actions being taken to benefit game species in addition to the broad range of other species being considered. OHA strongly supports the use of the Westside Elk Nutrition and Habitat-Use Models to identify management actions in these efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Mike Totey

Conservation Director

Oregon Hunters Association