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Organization: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Title: Regional Habitat Biologist

Comments: April 3, 2026

Slater Turner, Lookout Mountain District Ranger Ochoco National Forest

3160 NE 3rd Street Prineville, OR 97754

RE: Upper Trout and Bridge Creeks Vegetation Management Project #68970 Dear Mr. Turner,

As the agency mandated with management of Oregon's fish and wildlife (ORS 496.012), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is responding to your request for comments for the Upper Trout and Bridge Creeks Vegetation Management Project (Project). The Project is located approximately 38 miles outside Prineville, OR and proposes tree thinning, fuels reduction and supporting activities within 54,000 acres within the Lookout Mountain and a small portion of the Paulina Ranger District. The Project aims to create safer and more resilient conditions across the Ochoco National Forest.

The Department recognizes the need to reduce tree densities and fuels within stands in some areas and removing roadside dead/dying trees for safety purposes and has no major concerns over the proposed project. The Department appreciates measures included in the proposal that benefit fish and wildlife habitat.

The Department has the following specific comments/recommendations:

- * The Department is concerned regarding the construction of approximately 120 miles of temporary road and recommends limiting the number of roads created and opened as much as possible. The Department appreciates the stated plan that all temporary created roads within already disturbed areas would be decommissioned post-treatment, and supports the plan to utilize berms, boulders and debris to return the closures to pre-treatment conditions. We also support the plan to recontour, scarify and seed areas that were previously undisturbed, allowing for natural regeneration, as well as the plan to relock previously existing gates and re-construct berms and debris where they were functioning as road closures prior to the project.

- * The Department appreciates the limited occurrence of treatments within category 1 - 4 RHCAs, and that the treatment locations within these areas are limited to locations where existing roads are already present.

- * Within all RHCAs, the Department would like to know which stream crossing type will be selected for each proposed crossing (e.g., bridge, culvert). The Department encourages the stream crossings to be designed to meet the objectives of the FSM 7700 so that the physical, biological, and chemical integrity of the waters of the United States are protected and restored in accordance with Section 101 of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (Chapter 7720.2). Specifically, we encourage the minimization of bank erosion along with riparian zone and stream bed compaction, especially in instances where these Category 4 RHCA streams are connected to Category 1-3 waterbodies since the impacts may be realized the following year when flow resumes.

- * In response to the significant number of complaints received during the 2025 hunting seasons, the Department recommends that tree removal and prescribed burning activities be conducted outside of hunting seasons whenever practicable. Below are the 2026 season dates applicable to this area:

Pronghorn: August 22 - August 30

Archery deer and elk: August 29 - September 27 Turkey: September 1 - January 31

Rifle Deer: October 3 - October 14

Rifle Elk: August 15 - December 31 (youth #1), October 17 - October 25 (youth #2), October 28 - November 1, November 7 - 15

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have questions or want information that the Department can provide, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Jamie Bowles

Regional Habitat Biologist

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife