

Overview of the Government Camp – Cooper Spur Land Exchange Project

Pursuant to congressional direction and subject to certain legislative conditions, the Mt. Hood National Forest is proceeding to implement, insofar as it is within its control and authority, the conveyance of approximately 109 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Zigzag Ranger District in exchange for approximately 769 acres of private lands in Hood River County. Among other things, the current legislative conditions attached to the Land Exchange prescribe the reservation of a wetland conservation and trail easements on the Federal parcels to be exchanged. The Act also sets forth two related actions that are triggered into effect upon completion of the Land Exchange, namely the creation of the Crystal Springs Watershed Special Resources Management Unit (approximately 2,859 acres) and a change in designation of approximately 1,709 acres of NFS lands to wilderness, the effects of both of which are encompassed within the scope of the DEIS as connected actions.

The two NFS parcels to be exchanged are timbered, mostly undeveloped, and are physically separated by 40 acres that are already in private ownership. The NFS parcels are located on the gentle southwest facing slope of Mt. Hood at the north end of the village of Government Camp in Clackamas County. Elevations range from about 3,760 to 4,120 feet. The Federal parcels have been withdrawn from mineral entry through the Bureau of Land Management's segregation process.

The non-Federal lands that need to be offered in a formal, legally binding manner under the Act in order for the Forest Service to convey the NFS lands described above include approximately 251 acres located within, and 514 acres located outside, of the current NFS administrative boundary in Hood River County. The non-Federal estate is comprised of three diverse property types situated in the vicinity of the Cooper Spur Ski Area on the northeast flank of Mt. Hood. The three types are: the structures and personal property at the Cooper Ski Area; land and all development at the Cooper Spur Mountain Resort; and mostly vacant forest land.

As referenced above, the Forest Service is moving forward with this proposed action to comply with the congressional direction and conditions prescribed in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of March 30, 2009 (123 Stat. 991, P.L. 111-11), as potentially modified by the proposed Mount Hood Cooper Spur Land Exchange Clarification Act¹. As such, there is an underlying need to exchange lands between the Mt. Hood National Forest and Mt. Hood Meadows Oregon, LLC, consistent with specific congressional direction and the agency's other legal duties and responsibilities, and subject to particular conditions to the implementation and execution of the Land Exchange, whatever their final form may eventually take.

In order to comply with congressional direction, the proposed action also includes a programmatic amendment to the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) in order to assign management direction to the land the Forest Service would acquire pursuant to a finally executed Land Exchange; change the land allocations for the wilderness designation; and create the Crystal Springs Watershed Special Resources Management Unit.

¹ Although the proposed Clarification Act has passed both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in separate forms, as of the date of publication of the DEIS, it has not been enacted into law, and thus, whether the Forest Service ends up following the proposed legislative amendments it contains depends upon whether and when it ultimately may be. Information regarding the Clarification Act can be found here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/3826/all-info>.

The general public was first notified of the proposal in 2010. Notices of Intent to develop an Environmental Impact Statement were published in the Federal Register in October 2010 and again in February 2016. Through the feedback the Forest Service has received during the scoping process, it has determined that the public is primarily interested in the following issues related to the proposed action: the land equalization process; the type of public interest analysis and determination in which the Forest Service intends to engage given that the Land Exchange is congressionally prescribed; future use of the trails within the lands to be conveyed; development of the Crystal Springs Watershed Special Resources Management Unit; addition to the Mt. Hood Wilderness; the ability of the Forest Service to care for the facilities currently on the non-Federal lands that would be acquired; the tram corridor between Timberline and Government Camp; and effects on wildlife, wetlands, treaty rights, cultural resources, and recreation.

No significant issues were identified during review of the scoping process that led the agency to conclude that it needed to develop and analyze in detail wholly separate alternatives to the proposed action, especially in light of the fact that the proposed action is congressionally prescribed in considerable detail. While no significant issues that drive alternatives were identified, the DEIS discloses the potential effects of achieving the purpose and need objectives on a variety of resources, such as: cultural resources; hydrology; wetlands; water rights; threatened, endangered, and sensitive species (aquatics, wildlife, and plants); recreation; visuals; facilities; and socio-economics.

In addition to the no action and proposed action alternatives, the Forest Service considered two alternatives but determined that neither warranted evaluation in detail. They include a direct purchase alternative and a deed restriction alternative.

Currently, the Mt. Hood National Forest is providing a 90-day public comment period for this DEIS. The comment period will commence following the date of publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register. The publication date of the NOA in the Federal Register, which is October 28, 2016, is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted. Comments will be accepted via mail, fax and email at the following address:

Government Camp-Cooper Spur Land Exchange
Mt. Hood National Forest
16400 Champion Way
Sandy, Oregon 97055
503-668-1423 (fax)

You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments may be submitted to **comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood@fs.fed.us** in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc or .docx).