



File Code: 1950

Date: March 8, 2013

Dear Interested Party:

The Hood River Ranger District on the Mt. Hood National Forest has identified you as an individual, agency, or organization that might be interested in commenting on our Lava Restoration proposal to improve overall forest conditions in the West, Middle and East Fork Hood River Watersheds. The Proposed Action is to treat approximately 1,998 acres within these watersheds and to decommission or close approximately 24.5 miles of National Forest System (NFS) Roads.

The Lava Restoration planning area is located on the Hood River Ranger District of the Mt. Hood National Forest. The large majority of the roughly 13,800 acre project area falls within the Middle Fork Hood River Watershed with smaller portions within the East Fork and West Fork Hood River Watersheds. The project area consists of entirely NFS Lands. This planning area was analyzed based on management direction, on-the-ground conditions and preliminary field surveys to determine the acres to be treated as part of the Proposed Action. After conducting this analysis, approximately 1,998 acres are being proposed for treatment as part of this project.

Management Direction

Management direction for the project area is guided by the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended (Forest Plan) and the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). The Lava Restoration planning area encompasses numerous Land Use Allocations (LUA) prescribed by the Forest Plan. The majority of the planning area (64%) falls within the C1 (Timber Emphasis) LUA, which emphasizes active forest management. The additional LUAs within the Lava Restoration project area include A4 - Special Interest Area, B1 - Wild, Scenic & Recreational Rivers, B2 - Scenic Viewshed, B3 - Roaded Recreation, B5 - Pileated Woodpecker and Pine Marten Habitat Area, B6 - Special Emphasis Watershed and B10 - Deer and Elk Winter Range. While not emphasizing active timber management these LUAs do allow for timber management practices to achieve secondary objectives such as forest health improvement. Management guidance for the Lava Restoration project also comes from the Northwest Forest Plan. The Lava Restoration planning area encompasses multiple LUAs assigned by the NWFP. The majority of the planning area (68%) falls within the Matrix LUA. The Matrix LUA is where timber harvest and other silvicultural activities would be most appropriate. Other LUAs include Administratively Withdrawn, Riparian Reserves and Late-Successional Reserves. No treatments are proposed within Administratively Withdrawn or Late-Successional Reserves LUAs.

In addition to the guidance found within the Forest Plan and NWFP, project direction is also found within the East Fork, Middle Fork and West Fork Hood River Watershed Analysis documents. A watershed analysis is a systematic procedure to characterize the aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial features within a watershed. The information is used to refine riparian reserves boundaries, prescribe land management activities, including watershed restoration and develop monitoring programs. The majority of the project area falls within the Middle Fork Hood River Watershed (80%). The principal direction within the Middle Fork Hood River Watershed Analysis includes the following.

- Vegetative treatments should be focused in the sapling/pole and small tree stages of stand development especially where these conditions overlap with riparian reserves. Silvicultural treatments should support the development of existing young forests into late seral like structure.



- Management proposals need to incorporate treatments that include the upland and riparian areas.
- Treatments should use both pre-commercial and commercial harvest techniques to enhance late seral stand development.

Additional guidance from both the East Fork, Middle Fork and West Fork Watershed Analysis documents recommends pursuing huckleberry enhancement opportunities where available.

Purpose and Need

The overarching purpose of the project is to improve the overall forest conditions within the West, Middle and East Fork Hood River Watersheds. In order to meet this overall goal, the underlying needs based on management direction and the LUAs of the project would be to:

1. Improve forest health conditions by reducing competition, promoting increased growth and vigor, and increasing structural and species diversity within selected stands;
2. Improve growing conditions for huckleberry and other native understory vegetation by reducing shading and competition by overstory trees within selected stands;
3. Maintain a road system that meets transportation and/or access needs (including reducing the need for incurring ongoing maintenance costs) while reducing aquatic risk associated with specific roads; and,
4. Provide timber to meet local and/or regional demands for wood products.

Need 1 - Improve forest health conditions by reducing competition, promoting increased growth and vigor, and increasing structural and species diversity within selected stands.

The second-growth Douglas-fir dominated plantations within the Lava Restoration project area are dense and overcrowded. These crowded conditions have resulted in reduced growth and vigor due to competition for light, water and nutrients. These stands also lack both the structural and species diversity usually present within the area. To promote forest health and vigor, as well as increase structural and species diversity, these stands should be thinned to conditions that better meet the management goals and desired future conditions identified in the Forest Plan and East Fork, Middle Fork, and West Fork Watershed Analyses.

Need 2 - Improve growing conditions for huckleberry and other native understory vegetation by reducing shading and competition by overstory trees within selected stands.

The majority of the understory within the Lava Restoration project area is deficient in huckleberry as well as other native plants. In some cases, the huckleberry that is present is being shaded out by high density canopies. Big leaf huckleberry is not only an important component of the plant communities within the project area, but also has cultural significance for the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. To improve growing conditions for huckleberry and other native understory vegetation stands should be thinned to conditions that better meet the management goals and desired future conditions identified in the Forest Plan, East Fork, Middle Fork, and West Fork Watershed Analyses.

Need 3 - Maintain a road system that meets transportation and/or access needs (including reducing the need for incurring ongoing maintenance costs) while reducing aquatic risk associated with specific roads.

A desirable transportation system provides safe access, meets the needs of local communities and forest users; meets current and future resource management objectives; minimizes costs for ongoing maintenance, and has a minimal impact on natural resources. In order to improve the opportunities for

huckleberry picking and reduce impacts on aquatic resources it is necessary to reduce/restrict the open road density within the project area. Opportunities also exist to improve and/or maintain the transportation system in the Lava Restoration project area that are reasonable to implement concurrently with the proposed treatment activities, that would help facilitate log haul, and/or contribute to the long-term access needs.

Need 4 - Provide timber to meet local and/or regional demands for wood products.

Forest Plan timber resource management goals include keeping forests healthy and productive in part to sustainably provide forest products now and into the future. There is a need to use commercial harvest in managing forest vegetation in the Lava Restoration area in order to offer wood products to contribute to satisfying local demands. Also, one of the dual goals of the Northwest Forest Plan is to provide a sustainable level of forest products for local and regional economies and to provide jobs. Thinning is needed to keep forests healthy and productive to provide wood products now and in the future.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is comprised of approximately 1,998 acres of vegetative treatments and the decommissioning and/or closing of approximately 24.5 miles of NFS Roads within the West, Middle and East Fork Hood River Watersheds (see attached Vicinity and Proposed Action maps). The goal of these treatments is to improve overall forest conditions. To realize the goal of improving overall forest conditions the Forest Service proposes the following activities within the Lava Restoration Project Area listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposed Action Treatments

Vegetation Treatments	Acres
Planting	127
Sapling Thinning	164
Plantation Thinning	1,459
Firewood Removal	145
Huckleberry Enhancement	103
Total	1,998

Road Treatments	Miles
Decommission	2.1
Close	15.3
Seasonally Close	7.0
Total	24.4

The vegetative and road treatments listed in Table 1 are further discussed below as they relate to the underlying needs identified for the Lava Restoration project.

1. Improve forest health conditions by reducing competition, promoting increased growth and vigor, and increasing structural and species diversity within selected stands.

- Plantation Thinning (1,459 acres) treatments would be a variable density thin from below treatment in existing even-aged managed units designed to address high density issues that are leading to forest health concerns. These concerns are stress-related mortality, limited species

diversity, and limited structural diversity. Riparian areas within these plantations have the same forest health concerns. The overall desire for these treatments would be to move the riparian and upland portions of the selected plantations towards a more late seral like structure with a large tree component that is currently absent in the majority of these stands.

- Sapling Thinning (164 acres) treatments would mechanically thin small trees leaving approximately 60 to 100 trees per acre in the dry forest type and 100 to 200 trees per acre in the wet forest type to promote and develop more resilient stand conditions. Pile burning, and/or mechanical fuels treatments would be applied to these treatment areas. Fuels treatments could include, but would not be limited to, lop and scattering, masticating, or biomass collection. Biomass collection would include machine piling and removal of materials to be used to generate electricity.
 - Planting (127 acres) treatments are within plantations that were burned over in the 2011 Dollar Lake Fire. No vegetation manipulation would occur in this treatment other than removing hazard trees within the stands in order to facilitate safe tree planting operations. The goal of this treatment would be to restock plantations impacted by the Dollar Lake Fire with native tree species.
- 2. *Improve growing conditions for huckleberry and other native understory vegetation by reducing shading and competition by overstory trees within selected stands.***
- Huckleberry Enhancement (103 acres) treatments are within closed canopy stands and are designed to address the shading of a culturally important shrub that have limited regeneration and berry production. The treatment would create 2 to 5 acre openings centered around areas with insect and disease activity opening the canopy up to provide adequate sunlight for huckleberries to thrive.
 - Plantation and Sapling thinning treatments would also result in a net benefit by providing adequate sunlight for huckleberry plants to thrive.
- 3. *Maintain a road system that meets transportation and/or access needs (including reducing the need for incurring ongoing maintenance costs) while reducing aquatic risk associated with specific roads.***
- Decommission approximately 2.1 miles of roads.

Road Number	Length (Miles)
1610012	0.3
1612670	0.9
1630660	0.4
1640620	0.5
Total	2.1

- Close approximately 15.3 miles of road.

Road Number	Length (Miles)
1600014	0.3
1600015	0.4
1610011	0.4
1610630	1.0
1610640	0.6

Road Number	Length (Miles)
1610650	0.2
1610670	0.2
1611000	2.9
1612630	1.0
1612650	0.3
1631000	1.1
1631620	0.4
1631630	0.2
1640630	0.6
1640660	1.4
3511012	0.7
3511620	1.4
3511620	1.1
3511621	1.2
Total	15.4

- Seasonally close approximately 7.0 miles of road, allowing access during huckleberry harvesting season.

Road Number	Length (Miles)
1612640	1.8
1630660	1.4
1631000	0.9
1640000	0.2
1640000	1.4
1640620	1.3
Total	7.0

- Utilize and maintain/repair an estimated 70.0 miles of NFS roads to facilitate log haul.

4. *Provide timber to meet local and/or regional demands for wood products.*

- Firewood Removal (145 acres) treatments are within stands with a large component of dead and/or dying trees. Average stand age within this treatment is over 80 years. Treatments would mechanically remove dead and/or dying trees both standing and down for use as fuel wood. Sufficient snags and downed wood would be retained to meet wildlife needs. Approximately 400 cords of fuel wood would be produced with the implementation of this component of the Proposed Action.
- Plantation Thinning treatments would produce approximately 15-20 million board feet of timber with the implementation of the Proposed Action.

All thinning activities proposed in this project would apply variable density thinning (VDT), which allows flexibility to achieve overall treatment objectives. This allows emphasis to be placed on leaving vigorous trees of all sizes without concern for spacing. Leave tree spacing associated with variable density thinning would vary within and between units. Included in variable density thinning are skips and gaps within the stands to mimic more natural stands. Skips are areas where no trees would be removed; gaps are areas where few trees would be retained.

Gaps are intended to create openings to support regeneration of shade intolerant species and more rot resistant species while also providing structural diversity. The gaps for this project would vary in size based on the conditions within each unit. Gaps larger than 2-acres are needed to promote the regeneration of huckleberry plants as well as shade intolerant species (e.g., western white pine or larch) that are native to these stands.

Forest Plan Exceptions

There are several Forest Plan standards that would not be met in order to meet the Purpose and Need for Action as described above. Exceptions to the Forest Plan standards are allowed under the Forest Plan, if they are identified during the interdisciplinary process. The following exceptions were identified and will be analyzed as part of this project. Forest Plan page 4-45 states that for "should" standards "action is required; however, case-by-case exceptions are acceptable if identified during interdisciplinary project planning, environmental analyses. Exceptions are to be documented in environmental analysis (National Environmental Policy Act 1969) public documents." All other standards and guidelines are expected to be met with this proposal.

- Snags and Down Log Associated Species (FW-215): Where new timber harvest units occur (e.g., regeneration harvest and commercial thinning), wildlife trees (i.e., snags and green reserve trees) should be maintained in sufficient quantity and quality to support over time at least 60 percent of the maximum biological potential of primary cavity nesting species, e.g., woodpeckers.
- Snags and Down Log Associated Species (FW-219): An average total of at least 6 logs per acre in decomposition classes 1, 2 and 3 (USDA Forest Service 1985, Brown editor) should be retained in all project activity areas, e.g., clearcut, commercial thin, salvage, or overwood removal.

Opportunity for Public Comment

The Mt. Hood National Forest is now seeking comments from individuals, organizations, local and state governments, and other federal agencies that may be interested in or affected by the Proposed Action. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives to the Proposed Action. Your comments will help us assess the Proposed Action, develop alternatives and prepare an Environmental Assessment.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Forest Service would like your scoping comments by April 8, 2013. Please send your written comments to: Whitney Olsker, Hood River Ranger District, 6780 Highway 35, Mount Hood-Parkdale, Oregon 97041; FAX: (541) 352-7365. You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours which are 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood-hoodriver@fs.fed.us in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). All those who comment will remain on our mailing list and receive future updates on this proposal. Electronic maps and other information about the project are available on the Internet at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/mthood/landmanagement/projects>. If you have any questions concerning this proposal, please contact Whitney Olsker at (541) 467-5155 or wolsker@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

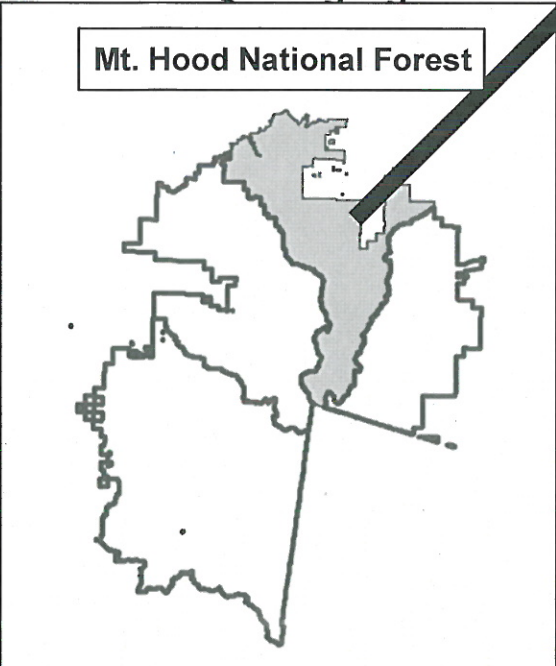
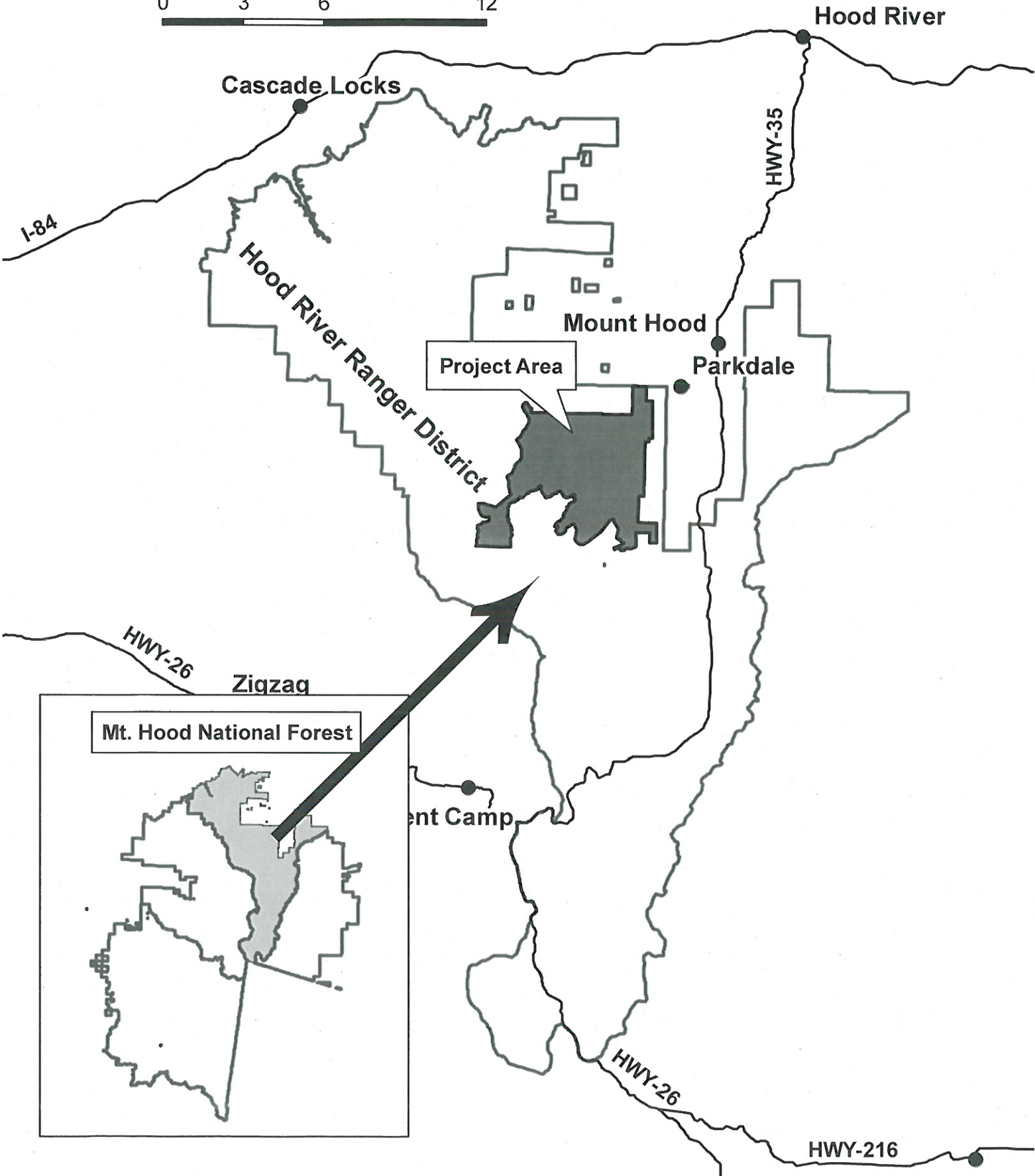
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Daina L. Bambe', is written above the printed name.

DAINA L. BAMBE
District Ranger

Enclosure



Lava Restoration Vicinity Map
National Forest: Mt. Hood
Ranger District: Hood River



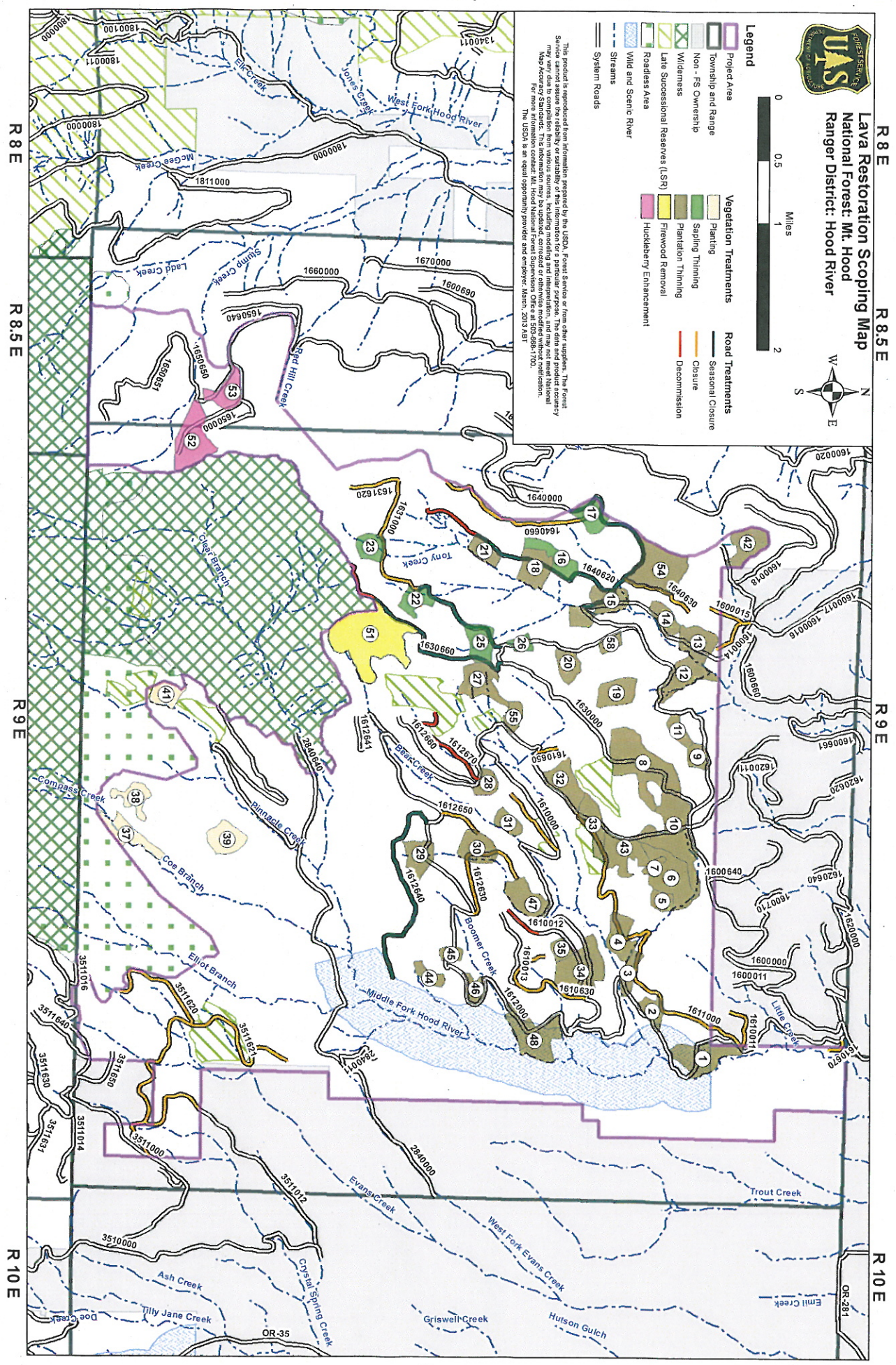


Lava Restoration Scoping Map
National Forest: Mt. Hood
Ranger District: Hood River



- Legend**
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|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Project Area | Vegetation Treatments | Road Treatments |
| Township and Range | Planting | Seasonal Closure |
| Non-FS Ownership | Sapling Thinning | Closure |
| Wilderness | Plantation Thinning | Decommission |
| Late Successional Reserves (LSR) | Firewood Removal | |
| Roadless Area | Huckleberry Enhancement | |
| Wild and Scenic River | | |
| Streams | | |
| System Roads | | |

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