



File Code: 1950

Date: June 4, 2009

Dear Interested Citizen,

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 the Gnarl Ridge Restoration proposal. The restoration proposal includes two projects: 1) the removal of trees felled along the Cloud Cap Road for future aquatic restoration projects; and 2) the planting of 300 to 450 acres within specified areas in the Cloud Cap Tilly Jane Historic District. In addition, we would like to take the opportunity to scope for comments on the Cloud Cap Weather Station proposal given that it is in the same geographical location as the Restoration proposal.

The Gnarl Ridge Fire was started by lightning on Thursday night, August 7, 2008 on the north flank of Mount Hood within the Mt Hood Wilderness. Suppression actions were taken on the fire but 10 days later heavy rains significantly reduced fire activity and risk. At this point the fire area was estimated to be 516 acres. On September 15th and 16th, unusually hot and dry conditions coupled with a persistent thermal belt during the night caused the fire to make a major run northward and spot outside of the wilderness boundary. Suppression efforts kept the overall size to approximately 3,280 acres with the majority of acres inside the Mount Hood Wilderness area and now newly designated and pending wilderness additions (March 2009 - Cloud Cap addition and the pending Tilly Jane Addition).

Cloud Cap Road Tree Removal for Aquatic Restoration Projects

Background: To provide for firefighter safety the Incident Management Team on the Gnarl Ridge Fire was authorized to fall hazard trees along the Cloud Cap Road. Due to the high number of hazard trees and the 'switchback' nature of the road it was essential to use mechanical equipment to safely fall the hazard trees. As a result, there is a corridor of felled trees, ranging from 100 feet to 150 feet on each side of the road. Presence of the felled trees not only affects the visual quality along the road but also will make it difficult to replant trees in this area.

Purpose and Need: The overall purpose of the project is to gather logs (a.k.a. fish logs) from this area to utilize in future aquatic restoration projects. The Mt Hood National Forest has a variety of aquatic restoration projects planned in the current and future years and gathering sufficient material to meet this need has been difficult. There is also an underlying need to remove felled material (that which is in excess of needs for site productivity) along the Cloud Cap Road to: 1) restore visual quality; and 2) to facilitate restorative actions such as replanting with native species.

Proposed Action: To remove felled trees within 100 feet of the Cloud Cap Road utilizing equipment that will stay within the road prism. The equipment will either pick up and swing logs onto log trucks or, where necessary, may pull logs with attached cable sufficiently close to where they can be picked up with the grapples. Felled trees identified for removal will be those



that are in excess of site productivity and wildlife habitat needs. Logs will be hauled from the site and stored in a secured area for future use in aquatic restoration projects. Some of the smaller sized material that is not needed to be retained on-site for site productivity or wildlife habitat, and which is not large enough for use in aquatic restoration, may be removed down to a more accessible location and be made available as firewood to be gathered under a personal use permit. Depending upon weather conditions, the proposal is to remove the logs either this fall (October or November, 2009) or next summer (2010).

The legal description for this project is T2S, R9E, Section 10. This location is outside any designated or newly designated or pending wilderness areas.

Decision to be Made: The Hood River District Ranger will decide whether or not to remove felled trees along Cloud Cap road to be used in aquatic restoration projects. This project will be analyzed under a categorical exclusion, category 36 CFR 220.6(e)(7): “Modification or maintenance of stream or lake aquatic habitat improvement structures using native materials or normal practices” (FSH 1909.15-2007-1, 31.2, 4/17/09). The analysis for this project will be undertaken by an interdisciplinary team and documented in a project file. If it is determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist (see FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3), the proposed project may be documented in a Decision Memo. A decision on this project is expected in August 2009.

Gnarl Ridge Planting Project

Purpose and Need: The overall purpose of the project is to re-vegetate and restore portions of the Gnarl Ridge Fire. To meet this purpose, there is an underlying need to plant portions of the burned area with native plant species. The legal description of the project is T2S, R9E, Section 10. This is the area on the north flank of Mount Hood, near Cloud Cap Inn.

Proposed Action: Approximately 450 acres of the Gnarl Fire area outside the existing, newly designated and pending wilderness areas were identified as areas suitable for planting with native tree species (see attached maps). Approximately 30 acres near Cloud Cap Inn is proposed for planting which would include whitebark pine, a historically occurring species whose populations are declining in this area and throughout the west. Use of native grasses and tree species would be emphasized in areas which burned severely. In addition to whitebark pine, other species to be planted include quaking aspen, white pine, noble fir, western larch, Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. The planting area is within the historic district and within ¼-mile of roadways in areas of moderate and high soil burn severity. Overall, approximately 300 acres would be planted in the Fall 2010. Additional acres may be planted if funding is available.

The legal description for this project is T2S, R9E, Section 10. This location is outside any designated or newly designated or pending wilderness areas.

Decision to be Made: The Hood River District Ranger will decide whether to plant portions of the burned area with native plant species. This project will be analyzed under a categorical exclusion, category 36 CFR 220.6(e)(11): “Post-fire rehabilitation activities, not to exceed 4,200 acres (such as tree planting, fence replacement, habitat restoration, heritage site restoration, repair of roads and trails, and repair of damage to minor facilities such as campgrounds), to

repair or improve lands unlikely to recover to a management approved condition from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire” (FSH 1909.15-2007-1, 31.2, 4/17/09). The analysis for this project will be undertaken by an interdisciplinary team and documented in a project file. If it is determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist (see FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3), the proposed project may be documented in a Decision Memo. A decision on this project is expected by August 2009.

Cloud Cap Weather Station

Background: In 2008, as a result of the Gnarl Ridge Fire, a temporary weather station was placed in the Cloud Cap area. Weather data, especially rainfall amounts, varied significantly from data acquired from other weather stations located within a ten mile radius of the Cloud Cap area. This discrepancy brought to light that weather patterns at Cloud Cap were significantly affected by local topography. Rainfall documented at the Red Hill weather station (5 miles NW of Cloud Cap) was almost one-half of that recorded at the Cloud Cap temporary weather station in 2008. Accurate weather data on precipitation amounts (including snowpack) would enable Middle Fork Irrigation District (MFID) to better able manage their usage of water resources within the Middle Fork Hood River Watershed. Better usage of the water resources would have a positive effect on threatened and endangered fish species including: Bull Trout (threatened), Spring Chinook Salmon (threatened), Winter Steelhead (threatened) and Coho (candidate for listing).

Purpose and Need: The overall purpose of the project is to provide weather data that would be utilized by MFID to better enable them to monitor snow-pack and potential water yield thereby allowing them to more efficiently manage their withdrawal program from the Eliot, Coe and Lake Branch drainages. To meet this purpose, there is an underlying need to install a permanent weather station and sno-tel site in close proximity to Cloud Cap Saddle as is feasible while maintaining goals and objectives specified for the Cloud Cap Tilly Jane Historic District.

Proposed Action: The proposal is to install and maintain a solar powered weather station and sno-tel site within close proximity to the Cloud Cap Road in the Ghost Ridge area. The station would require a weather proof building (approximately 6-feet wide by 6-feet deep by 16-feet in height), precipitation gage 16-feet in height, antenna tower for data transmission, 10-foot snow pillow, solar panels, air temp and pressure sensors, wind gage, and fenced enclosure. Height of the tower would facilitate maintenance of the equipment, if needed, during deep snow conditions. Once installed, maintenance of the site would be provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

In addition, Eliot and Polallie Drainages (located on either side of the Cloud Cap/Tilly Jane Historic District) are highly susceptible to debris torrent events when heavy rainfall occurs. The information collected at the site could provide for early warning of potential flood/debris torrents within these drainages that could threaten critical infrastructure such as diversion and water storage structures, public highways, and site access roads. In November 2006, such an event occurred that resulted in one vehicle parked on the Eliot Diversion access road to be swept downstream over ¼ mile. Fortunately, the occupant escaped with few injuries even though the vehicle was totally destroyed. Another benefit to the community from this project would be the ability for Search and Rescue personnel (County Sheriffs Dept. and Crag Rats) to have accurate

current weather information in the event there is a need to utilize Cloud Cap Saddle as an access point for search and rescue operations on the East and North side of Mt. Hood.

The legal description for this project also is T2S, R9E, Section 10. This location is outside any designated, newly designated or pending wilderness areas.

Decision to be Made: The Hood River District Ranger will decide whether or not to place a weather station near Cloud Cap Road. This project will be analyzed under a categorical exclusion, category 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3): "Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land" (FSH 1909.15-2007-1, 31.2, 4/17/09). The analysis for this project will be undertaken by an interdisciplinary team and documented in a project file. If it is determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist (see FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3), the proposed project may be documented in a Decision Memo. Analysis for this project will be completed in Winter 2009/2010 with a decision expected by March 2010.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this proposal, please bring them to our attention by **July 3, 2009**. Send comments to Jennie O'Connor Card, 6780 Highway 35; Mt. Hood/Parkdale, OR 97041. For more information on the Gnarl Ridge Restoration proposal, you may contact Kim Smolt at (541) 352-6002 x703 or ksmolt@fs.fed.us. For more information on the Cloud Cap Weather Station, you may contact Leo Segovia t at (541) 352-6002 x638 or lsegovia2@fs.fed.us. Electronic comments may also 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).

Sincerely,

DAINA L. BAMBE
District Ranger

Enclosures