
Recreation & Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

Introduction

Forest visitors desire or expect specific types of recreational experiences and settings. Recreational opportunities are described in this recreation analysis in relationship to the Easy Project. This analysis describes system trails and dispersed sites in the Easy Fire Project area and analyzes affects of proposed activities on those recreation resources. Guidelines from the Malheur National Forest *Land and Resource Management Plan* 1990 are used to determine the condition of dispersed campsites.

The existing condition and effects of alternatives on Scenery (and Visuals) are not discussed here. They are discussed separately under the Chapter 3 Scenery section.

Regulatory Framework

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

The project area is managed as roaded modified and roaded natural. The project area has motorized opportunities from previous timber harvest; however, Access Management Plans have reduced these roaded opportunities over the last few years.

Those seeking roaded access and a more modified environment may find more opportunities available to them as harvest activities take place.

Management Direction

Forest Plan direction is to manage General Forest and Rangeland (MA 1 & 2) to construct, relocate, or protect designated system trails during management activities, to maintain dispersed camping opportunities in a roaded setting and manage these areas for partial retention as roaded modified. In addition, the Forest Plan includes direction to provide roaded recreation opportunities. Management Area 13 (Old Growth) is also to be managed as roaded modified.

Recreation in MA 3A (Non-Anadromous Riparian) is managed as roaded modified but standards include limiting and distributing [recreation] use as necessary to protect and/or rehabilitate riparian areas.

Analysis Methods

GIS was used to identify dispersed campsites. The recreation analysis considered the area within the fire boundary.

Existing Condition

Currently, the Easy Fire planning area plays an important role by providing settings for various types of outdoor recreation hunting, camping, driving in the woods, hiking and

winter activities. Due to ease of access from U.S. Highway 26, this area is popular with recreationists. Visitors may enjoy the project area for a host of outdoor recreational opportunities. FSR 2635 provides the main access for roaded admission from U.S. Highway 26 into the planning area. The major roads are gravel-surfaced, one-lane, and native surface routes initially developed to provide timber access, which now provides access for recreation type activities. Mushroom gathering is expected to greatly increase in the short-term and then taper off in following years. Recreational hunting for shed deer and elk antlers and other activities occur as well. Viewing scenery and enjoying the landscape is a part of all these activities.

Trails

There are approximately 4 miles of snowmobile trail within the planning area on FSR 2635. This is a groomed route used when snow is at least twelve inches in depth. General maintenance concerns include felling of hazard trees to protect the trail. This trail is in fairly good shape and requires minimal maintenance.

Dispersed Recreation Use

The analysis area receives low to moderate recreation use, spread throughout a six month period starting in late May and running through mid-November. Under the code-a-site-system, two dispersed campsites are located within the project area and offer recreationists a more primitive camping experience. There are other dispersed campsites not recorded in GIS; they may not be recorded in GIS because there is little or no current use at these sites.

Environmental Consequences

This section addresses affects on dispersed campsites, and trails in the Easy area. Effects to Recreation are measured in terms of whether alternatives meet the Recreation Objectives outlined in the Forest Plan. These effects can be direct, indirect, or cumulative.

The principal basis for analysis of environmental consequences in the Easy Project area are forest visitors' desires or expectations of specific types of experiences and settings. These settings and opportunities can be described using the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) guidelines. Effects on the recreational resource can be assessed by analyzing changes in the acres of each ROS class that would result under the various alternatives. A change in ROS class reflects a change in available recreation opportunities.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Methods used to evaluate the effects of the alternatives include: changes in the ROS; harvest in currently important recreation places and recreation sites.

Alternative 1 (No Action)

The ROS was not changed by the fire and will not change as a result of this alternative.

While recreational visits within the area would remain near the same levels as previous years, under this alternative, traditional use patterns and recreational opportunities would be impacted.

The two identified (GIS) dispersed campsites are not recognized as experiencing erosion or off-site vegetation damage, and will remain in their current condition. As a result, minor soil and vegetation degradation would continue to occur at this site from the historic use.

Recreationists will continue to use other dispersed sites that may have undesirable conditions and that are not recorded in GIS. No new planned and designated dispersed campsites will be created to replace dispersed campsites within riparian areas.

FSR 2635 has traditionally provided access into numerous other Forest Service roads leading to dispersed campsites. Day use activities such as fishing, sightseeing, and driving would decrease due to obstruction by fallen hazard trees along roads. Based on past observations, motorists would likely create new parking and camping areas to replace traditionally used roads. This would increase ground disturbance in the project area. Hazard trees along roads, trailheads, trail crossings, developed recreation sites, and dispersed campsites would increase public safety risks.

No improvements to road access will result in no increase in opportunities for those who prefer an easily accessed setting. Generally, improved roads mean better access resulting in an increase in recreational visitors. It is expected that as more recreationists use the planning area (USDA Forest Service, 2000), and as recreational means of transportation advance, there will be an associated increase in need for road-related recreation activities.

Alternative 1 would maintain limited access due to lack of improvement of roads.

As dead and damaged trees fall, cross-country travel will become difficult. People will have to crawl over downed material to get from one place to another.

Alternatives 2, 3 and 4

There will be no change in the ROS classification if either of these alternatives is implemented.

In Alternatives 2, 3 and 4, harvest activities may displace some recreationists to new areas to camp, hunt, or to travel due to decreased aesthetic appeal of the forest. Alternative 2 will harvest more than alternative 3 and 4 resulting in displacing some forest visitors over a broader area on the landscape. Noise may be heard from harvest actions resulting in some impacts on recreationists during this type of activity and may adversely affect the experiences of some people. Haul routes will be heavily used by logging traffic, creating a higher level of safety concern for the recreating public using roads. Closure of roads within sale areas in the Easy Fire Recovery Project area to public use during logging and hauling activities would improve public safety, but would have a short-term negative effect on recreational access to the area (see Chapter 2, Mitigation Measures, Public Safety). In alternative 4, high levels of snag habitat may pose safety concerns particularly for those recreationists who enjoy cross-country hiking.

All alternatives will provide safe and adequate roaded and trail access for the recreating public, through the cutting of hazard trees. Dispersed recreation will occur in the project area.

Alternative 5

Alternative 5 will maintain limited access due to less improvement of roads in this action alternative. This alternative will provide safe and adequate roaded, and trail access for the recreating public, through the cutting of hazard trees. No harvest will occur, so recreationists would not be affected by noise and traffic from harvest; however, noise and traffic from fuels reduction activities would occur and could negatively impact recreational experiences. Dispersed sites would remain accessible as described in Alternatives 2, 3, and 4. Decommissioning roads can reduce access for some recreational type activities such as traveling roads.

Effects common to 2, 3, 4, and 5

Recreational values will be also altered for visitors due to burned trees and vegetation. There will be a lack of shade for campsites.

Although these alternatives all propose to close Rd. 2600391, others will remain open. There would be reduced roaded opportunities to publics who use roads to hunt, camp, gather mushrooms or berries because of road closure. Areas once easily accessible to the public may require additional effort (e.g. longer hikes or use of horses) to be accessed. This would benefit those visitors who prefer less roaded recreation.

Firewood cutting could increase with the number of dead trees available. Mushroom gathering is expected to occur for the next one to two years. Horn hunting and other activities occur as well. Christmas tree cutting will be limited in the project area.

Hunting experiences will be changed as well. As ground cover grows, it will provide more forage for big game animals. Hunting may be less desirable until new under-story vegetation is established. Hunters should anticipate a change in game use due to a loss of cover and winter range. Although future recreation use within the project area is difficult to determine, visitation has increased rapidly in the past few years. As the project area changes over time, so may the make-up of visitors and the activities they pursue. Recreationists will have to either adapt to new situations or seek another area in which to recreate.

Special forest product gatherers often visit from outside the community. For instance, because morel mushrooms respond to disturbances such as fire, it is believed that the area will have a great potential in spring 2003 for a major morel harvest. Mushroom gathering will have a short-term effect, possibly interfering with other recreation activities. These forest users favor few restrictions on access to gather mushrooms and other special forest products.

Under Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 the project area would continue to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities, activities, settings, and experiences. However, recreation in roaded settings would clearly dominate. In the short term, change in setting would generally result in a small increase in roaded settings.

Cumulative Effects

No Action Alternative

Recreation activities will continue.

Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5

As described above, past activities and occurrences, particularly the Easy Fire, have affected the recreation resource. Past and proposed activities that could affect recreation resources have been analyzed in direct and indirect effects. Recreation activities, including hunting, camping, firewood cutting, and other uses, will continue as described above. In review of the list of past, present, and foreseeable actions at the beginning of Chapter 3, no other ongoing or future actions are expected to have a measurable affect on the recreation resource.

Consistency with Direction and Regulations

All alternatives are consistent with Forest Plan direction and regulations. There are no irreversible or irretrievable commitments related to recreation from this project.