

# Recreation Specialist Report

## Flagtail Fire Recovery Project

Salvage Harvest and  
Fire Restoration Projects



Malheur National Forest  
Blue Mountain Ranger District

Grant County, Oregon

/s/Shannon Winegar

Shannon Winegar  
Recreation Specialist

02-02-2004

Date



## Table of Contents

Recreation Specialist Report	Page
Introduction	3
Abstract	3
Regulatory Framework	3
Analysis Method	4
Existing Condition	4
Environmental Effects	7
Cumulative Effects	12
Definitions	14
Literature Cited	15

## INTRODUCTION

This recreation report is a look at the Flagtail Fire Recovery project area and its resources in order to define the Flagtail Project area is based on the desire or expectation of forest visitors for specific types of experiences and settings. To look at the desired recreation character, assess existing conditions and determine what means would be necessary and appropriate to maintain, and /or move the recreation character of existing facilities and dispersed campsites. The report lists facilities in the Flagtail Fire Project Area as well as existing conditions for dispersed sites. Guidelines from the Malheur National Forest *Land and Resource Management Plan 1990* are used to determine the condition of facilities and dispersed campsites. The report is divided into two sections: 1) Existing Condition and 2) Effects of Alternatives for Recreation.

### **SECTION 1 – EXISTING CONDITION ABSTRACT**

Currently, the Flagtail Fire planning area contains a wide variety of recreational activities. This area plays an important role by providing settings for various types of outdoor recreation – hunting, camping, driving in the woods, hiking and winter activities. Viewing opportunities are abundant at the adjacent Aldrich and McClellan Mountain roadless areas. Due to ease of access from Forest Service Road (FSR) 63, this area is popular with recreationists where visitors may enjoy the project area for outdoor recreational opportunities. FSR 63 provides the main access for roaded and other recreational activities. With the exception of FSR 63 the major road, corridors are gravel-surfaced, one-lane, and native surface routes initially developed to provide timber and mineral access, which now provides access for recreation type activities. Firewood cutting can increase with the number of dead trees available. Mushroom gathering is expected to greatly increase this year and then taper of in the following years. Horn hunting and other activities occur as well. Viewing scenery and enjoying the landscape is a part of all these activities. Christmas tree cutting will also be limited in the project area.

## 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.

### **ROS**

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a framework for a change in resource management uses, policies, and actions on recreation opportunities could be better

identified and, when adverse, mitigated or prevented. Recreation opportunities were defined as the combination of biological, physical, social, and managerial conditions that give recreational value to a place. ROS give particular attention to the settings in which these uses and activities occurred. This has the advantage of focusing attention and action on resource settings and conditions; it enables managers to begin to consider how changes (e.g., a new road to serve a timber sale) might affect existing or potential recreation settings and the recreational uses and experiences associated with those settings. ROS evaluates the consequences of any given change. It gives some frame of reference as to what conditions were desired and was necessary in order to frame options. For example, a new road might be seen as having an adverse consequence for existing recreation opportunities (e.g., because it led to increased use of a “primitive” opportunity). However, these adverse consequences might be prevented or mitigated by design considerations (e.g., the timing of when salvage would be permitted).

The ROS framework helps managers. For example, sound is a physical phenomenon susceptible to objective, quantitative measurement. When either the level of sound, or the particular form of sound, is judged as inappropriate or unacceptable, they are defined as “noise,” a measure of importance. Sound is reflected across different kinds of recreation settings (ranging, for example, from a highly developed campground to a wilderness), where one finds that what constitutes “noise” changes dramatically.

The ROS framework therefore can help managers in thinking about, and developing appropriate management responses for, a particular type of impact. It forces an explicit consideration of assumptions (e.g., the idea of “no impact”), it requires managers to think across functional and jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., what types of sounds, their origin), and it provides the opportunity for consideration of alternatives (e.g., banning the source, buffering its effects, altering its timing, informing users about it).

The Forest Plan direction is to manage General Forest and Rangeland (MA 1 & 2) to construct, relocate, or protect designated system trails and facilities during management activities. To maintain dispersed camping opportunities in a roaded setting and to manage these areas for partial retention. To provide roaded recreation opportunities.

Manage Developed Recreation Site (MA 12) opportunities to provide interpretation and enhancement of natural resources. Manage as roaded modified.

## **Analysis Methods**

GIS was used to identify dispersed campsites. The analysis looked within the fire boundary.

## **EXISTING CONDITION**

### **Developed Recreation Facilities**

The project area has one developed site, which is the Bear Valley Work Center, which is a Recreation Rental with public service facilities available for recreationist convenience.

The Bear Valley Work Center is staffed during the summer months for fire crews. During the off-season, the site is rented. Since the fire, the site has not been available for renting. Approximately 4 to 6 vehicles can park at the site. There is one trailhead within the project area. The existing trailhead is located at the Bear Valley Work Center. Use is considered low at the trailheads (2 people day). The major maintenance problem with developed sites is restricting vehicle use within the administrative site. Barriers are placed at this site to reduce this kind of activity. Hazard trees and some tree planting occur to reduce hazards and to stock for vegetation management of the sites. Bear Valley Work Center has a pole and wire fence around the site to keep the cows from entering the site. Routine maintenance includes rocking the road, pulling noxious weeds, and monitoring any paths created by recreationist that led to the nearby stream.

### **Trails**

There is approximately 3 miles bike trail within the planning area on the paved County Road 63. The majority of the trail is rated in the more difficult and most difficult categories. General maintenance concerns include felling of hazard tree to protect the trail.

This trail is in fairly good shape with minimal maintenance. The fire had no impact on the trail. The fire damaged the existing trailhead.

### **Dispersed Recreation Use**

The analysis area receives low to moderate recreation use, which is spread throughout a six month period starting in late May and running through mid-November. Under the code-a-site-system, one dispersed campsite is located within the project area and offers the recreationist a more primitive camping experience.

This one dispersed campsite is within a riparian area with little evidence of water quality impacts and concerns. The dispersed site is in the Snow Creek 60509 subwatershed. Use of this site varies throughout the year, with the majority of use being heaviest during the fall hunting season. Dispersed campsites are characterized by primitive structures such as self-made toilets, meat poles, rock fire ring, and log benches built by campers. Varied degrees of vegetation and riparian zone damage occur throughout the watershed due to vehicles, sanitation practices, and removal of vegetation for various purposes.

## **SECTION 2 – EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVES TO RECREATION**

### **FOR**

### **FLAGTAIL PLANNING AREA**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

The principal method for analyzing environmental consequences in the Flagtail Project area is based on the desire or expectation of forest visitors for specific types of experiences and settings. These settings and experience opportunities can be described using the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) guidelines. The effects on the recreational resource can be assessed by analyzing the change in the acres of each ROS class that would result under the alternatives. A change in ROS class would reflect a change in the available recreation opportunities.

Under all the action alternatives, the project area will continue to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities, activities, settings, and experiences; however, the roaded settings clearly dominate. In the short term, change in setting generally result in a small increase in roaded settings. Methods used to evaluate the effects of the alternatives include: changes in the ROS; harvest in currently important recreation places, recreation sites, roadless area; and other activities.

## **Environmental Consequences**

### ***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 Flagtail Fire Recovery Project. This analysis describes facilities and dispersed sites in the Flagtail 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 is used to determine the condition of facilities and dispersed campsites.

This report addresses the effects to Recreation facilities, dispersed campsites, and trails of the Flagtail area. Effects to Recreation are measured in terms of whether the 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 Flagtail Project area is Forest visitors' desire or expectation of specific types of experiences and settings. These settings and experience opportunities can be described using the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) guidelines. The effects on the recreational resource can be assessed by analyzing the change in the acres of each ROS class that would result under the alternatives. A change in ROS class would reflect a change in the available recreation opportunities.

Under all the action alternatives, the project area will continue to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities, activities, settings, and experiences; however, recreation in roaded settings clearly dominates. In the short term, change in setting generally results in a small increase in roaded settings. Methods used to evaluate the effects of the alternatives include: changes in the ROS; harvest in currently important recreation places, recreation sites, roadless area; and other activities.

### ***ROS and Developed Recreation Facilities***

#### **Direct and Indirect Effects**

##### ***No Action Alternative***

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

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

The one identified (GIS) dispersed campsite is not recognized as experiencing erosion or off-site vegetation damage, and will remain in its current condition. As a result, minor soil and vegetation degradation would continue to occur at this site. 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.

The Bear Valley Work Center (Recreation Rental) would not be repaired. Ground disturbances would likely increase as recreationists park their vehicles and trailers in any available space. If the administrative site remains in this currently poor condition, it would continue to degrade, since no corrective measures would occur. Trees that become hazards will not be dealt with.

County Road 63 has traditionally provided access into numerous Forest Service roads leading to dispersed campsites. Day use activities such as fishing, sightseeing, and driving would decrease due to hazard trees along the roads. Based on past observations, motorists would likely create new parking and camping areas to replace the 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.

With no improvement of road access will result in no increase in opportunities for those who prefer an easily accessed setting due to no timber harvest, which will lead to no increase in hunting, fishing, and other recreational use of an area. Usually improved road means better access resulting in an increase of recreational visitors. It is expected that as more recreationist use the planning area, and as recreational means of transportation advance, there will be an associated increase in need for road-related recreation activities.

Large fires can be distracting or dangerous to Forest visitors, and they modify the recreation setting. With no management of hazards along roads and trails lead to unsafe conditions for visitors with no treatment.

The one identified dispersed campsite identified may require the use of native materials (boulders, logs, gravel) to define and harden the site, which would help retain the natural appearance desired by dispersed campers. These improvements would provide recreationists a desirable site and decrease the risk of recreationists creating new sites that are undesirable (because they increase soil and vegetation disturbance within the analysis area).

The Bear Valley Work Center access road would be rocked, and barrier rock would be placed to discourage use where not wanted to prevent impact to the Silvies River and riparian vegetation. Develop a Vegetation Plan for long-term management of the administrative site.

Hazard trees along roadways, trailheads, and dispersed sites will be managed for hazards and felled.

### *Effects common to all action alternatives*

Hunting may be less desirable until new under-story vegetation is established. 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 the new situations or seek another area in which to recreate.

Harvest activities would change the recreational experiences available at recreation places. Although the action alternatives propose to close some roads after harvest, others will remain open.

Visual quality along Flagtail Mountain Loop Bike Trail will be predominantly natural appearing.

Mushroom gathering will have a short-term effect, possibly interfering with normal recreation activities.

## **Alternatives**

### **Alternatives 2 and 3, and 5**

There will be no change in the ROS classification if any of these alternatives are implemented.

With alternatives 2, 3, and 5 harvest activities may displace some recreationist and the one special use permit holder to new areas to camp, hunt, or to travel due to decreased aesthetic appeal of the forest and the noise associated with the harvest activities. These alternatives will harvest more acres resulting in displacing some recreationist over a broader area on the landscape.

Alternatives 2 and 5 will harvest more acres resulting in displacing some recreationist over a broader area on the landscape than Alternative 3. Noise may be heard from the harvest activities may result in some impacts on Forest visitors during this type of activity and adversely affecting the recreational experience for some people. Decommissioning roads can reduce access for some recreational type activities such as traveling roads. Haul routes will be heavily used by logging traffic causing congestion. This will create a higher level of safety concerns for the recreating public on roads. Signs will be posted to reduce this hazard.

With alternative 2 and 3 there will be an increase in access to the area from the .3 miles of new road. The 13.1 miles of decommissioned roads will decrease access for some people into some areas of the planning area.

With alternative 3 the 3,860 acres with high levels of snag habitat may pose safety concerns for the recreating public and the scenic qualities. Some people may view the snags as unpleasant to look at.

In Alternatives 3 and 5, the areas with high levels of snag habitat may pose safety concerns for the recreating public who enjoy cross-country hiking.

All alternatives will provide safe and adequate roaded, trail, and trailhead access for the recreating public, through the cutting of hazard trees. Dispersed recreation will occur in the project area. The dispersed site at the junction of FS Roads 133 and 033 will be available for use, but access will be from Road 033 instead of Road 133. Closing FS

Road 048 at the FS Road 050 junction will leave one campsite open but will close the remaining campsites in Jack Creek RHCAs. Forest Plan states to limit use as necessary to protect and/or rehabilitate riparian areas. The campsites are not in good locations causing degradation of the RHCA by vehicle use trampling vegetation and compacting soils.

In Alternative 5, with snag distributions expected at the landscape level, the area may appear more natural looking to the recreationist with timber harvest not as noticeable.

With alternative 2 and 3 there will be an increase in access to the area from the .3 miles of new road. The 13.1 miles of decommissioned roads will decrease access for some people into some areas of the planning area.

With alternative 3 the 3,860 acres with high levels of snag habitat may pose safety concerns for the recreating public and the scenic qualities. Some people may view the snags as unpleasant to look at.

The recreational experiences available may be changed by road and harvest activities at some recreation sites. Certain recreation experience needs will not be satisfied, based on the extent to which the natural environment has been modified, the degree of outdoor skills needed to enjoy the area, and the relative density of recreation use. The possible effects include increased sights and sounds of equipment, people, and helicopter within the planning area during harvest activity. The visual character of some recreation sites will also be changed from management activities.

The recreational experiences available may be changed by road and harvest activities at some recreation sites. Certain recreation experience needs will not be satisfied, based on the extent to which the natural environment has been modified, the degree of outdoor skills needed to enjoy the area, and the relative density of recreation use. The possible effects include increased sights and sounds of equipment, people, and helicopter within the planning area during harvest activity. The visual character of some recreation sites will also be changed from management activities.

#### **Alternative 4**

Alternative 4 will limit access due to less improvement of roads. This alternative will provide safe and adequate roaded, trail and trailhead 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 the harvest, however, noise and traffic from fuels reduction activities would occur and could negatively impact recreational experiences. Sispersed sites would remain accessible as described in Alternatives 2, 3, and 5. Decommissioning roads can reduce access for some recreational type activities such as traveling roads.

With alternative 4 the year- round restricted 6.6 miles of road will limit access to some people.

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.

With alternative 4 the year- round restricted 6.6 miles of road will limit access to some people.

With alternative 4 any future large, high-intensity fires may not be desirable because they would curtail recreation. Recreationists generally want a “healthy” aesthetically pleasing forest.

The one identified dispersed campsite identified may require the use of native materials (boulders, logs, gravel) to define and harden the site, which would help retain the natural appearance desired by dispersed campers. These improvements would provide recreationists a desirable site and decrease the risk of recreationists creating new sites that are undesirable (because they increase soil and vegetation disturbance within the analysis area).

The Bear Valley Work Center access road would be rocked, and barrier rock would be placed to discourage use where not wanted to prevent impact to the Silvies River and riparian vegetation. Develop a Vegetation Plan for long-term management of the administrative site.

Trail users will experience a variety of short-term visual impacts along County Road 63. Visual impacts will vary according to the level of tree stands adjacent to trails. Stumps and logging slash will be highly visible in the short-term, but will become less noticeable as under-story vegetation develops. Removing potentially hazardous trees along the trail may create a corridor of stumps through areas that will be limited to thick pockets of timber and riparian area. Removing potentially hazardous snags will decrease trail maintenance needs in the long-term but will increase them in the short-term as dead trees fall into the clearing limits of the trail (road).

### **Effects common to all action alternatives**

Hunting experience will be changed. 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 changes in forage. 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 the new situations or seek another area in which to recreate.

Special forest product gatherers often visit from outside the community. 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.

The Bear Valley Work Center will not be completely available as before the fire, it will be on a case-by-case basis. The rest of the facility will be dealt with under another document in order to rebuild the structures and prepare them for the Recreation Rental Program.

Although all the Alternatives propose to close some roads after harvest or fuel reduction, others will remain open.

Visual quality along Flagtail Mountain Loop Bike Trail will be predominantly natural appearing.

Under all the alternatives the project area will continue to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities, activities, settings, and experiences, however, recreation in roaded settings clearly dominates. In the short term, change in setting generally results in a small increase in roaded settings.

It is useful to keep in mind that activities vary in importance over time. Therefore, sites that are there today may not be in the future. So this data is valid only over an intermediate length of timeframe.

## **Cumulative Effects**

### ***No Action Alternative***

Recreation activities will continue.

### ***Alternatives 2, 3, and 4***

Recreation activities will continue. With additional projects planned or likely to be planned harvest type activities may have an effect on the ROS and an effect on the recreation resources. There may be adverse impacts to publics who hunt, camp, gather mushrooms or berries, and hike within the project area as roads are removed from the transportation system. Areas once easily accessible to the public may require additional effort (e.g., longer hikes or use of horses) to be accessed.

## **Executive Order**

The Bear Valley Work Center was rented in the past, and most likely will be back on the recreation rental program in the future.

## **Short-term Recreation**

- ◆ Relocate recreationist to a different area due to decreased aesthetic appeal of the forest.
- ◆ Hunters should anticipate a change in game populations use to a loss of cover and winter range.

- ◆ Decreased road access from road decommissioning may limit the recreational visitors favorite campsite or area.
- ◆ Noise from harvest activities may affect the recreational experience for some people.
- ◆ The Bear Valley Work Center will not be available as a recreation rental for a short period of time.
- ◆ Lack of shade for campsites.
- ◆ Safety in the forest may constrict people to smaller or limited areas, which would cause more frequent encounters with other recreationists.
- ◆ Special forest product gatherers often visit from outside the community. Because morel mushrooms respond to disturbances such as fire, it is believed the area will have a great potential in spring 2003 for a major morel harvest. These forest users favor few restrictions on access to gather mushrooms and other special forest products.
- ◆ Access to areas closed by the fire closure due to safety will limit recreational activities.
- ◆ Many visitors come to the area to experience the scenic beauty and recreate in the woods, this will be altered for the short-term due to decreased beauty of the area.

### **Long-term**

- ◆ Hunting experience will be changed. As ground cover grows, it will provide more forage for big game animals. With forest management strategies that would encourage prefire population levels to return will help with some game animals.
- ◆ Recreational values will be altered for visitors due from burnt trees and vegetation. It is not an old growth forest anymore, and not green. The area that once was characterized by predominantly natural-appearing environment has been changed from the fire. The pleasing scenic quality of the area has been changed from the fire.
- ◆ Access to some areas may be eliminated from decommissioned roads.
- ◆ Loss of some dispersed campsites due to burnt trees. Recreationists generally want a “healthy” aesthetically pleasing forest.

## Definition of Terms

### Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

The Forest Service developed the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) system to help identify, quantify, and describe the variety of recreational settings available in National Forests. The ROS system provides a framework for planning and managing recreation resources. The ROS settings are classified on a scale ranging from primitive to urban. Seven elements are used to determine where the setting belongs on the scale:

**Visual Quality:** the degree of apparent modification of the natural landscape.

**Access:** the mode by which activities are pursued and how well users can travel to or within the setting.

**Remoteness:** the extent to which individuals perceive themselves removed from the sight and sounds of human activity.

**Visitor Management:** the degree and appropriateness of how visitor actions are managed and serviced.

**On-Site Recreation Development:** the degree and appropriateness of recreation facilities provided within the setting.

**Social Encounters:** the degree of solitude or social opportunities provided.

**Visitor Impacts:** the degree of impact on both the attributes of the setting and other visitors within the setting.

Based on the seven elements, the Forest Service assigns one of six ROS settings zones to all Forest Service land; four of these apply to the project area.

**Roaded Modified:** A natural environment substantially modified, particularly by vegetation and landform alterations. There is strong evidence of roads and /or highways. Frequency of contact is low to moderate.

**Roaded Natural:** A natural-appearing environment with moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of humans. Such evidence usually harmonizes with the natural environment. Interaction between users may be moderate to high with evidence of other users prevalent. Motorized use is allowed.

**Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized:** A natural or natural-appearing environment of moderate to large size. Concentration of users is low, but there is often evidence of other users. Use of local roads for recreational purposes is not allowed.

**Semi-Primitive Motorized:** A natural or natural-appearing environment of moderate to large size. Interaction between users is low, but there is often evidence of other users. The opportunity exists to use motorized equipment.

## **Literature Cited**

USDA. 1990. Malheur National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

USDA. 1990. ROS Primer and Field Guide.