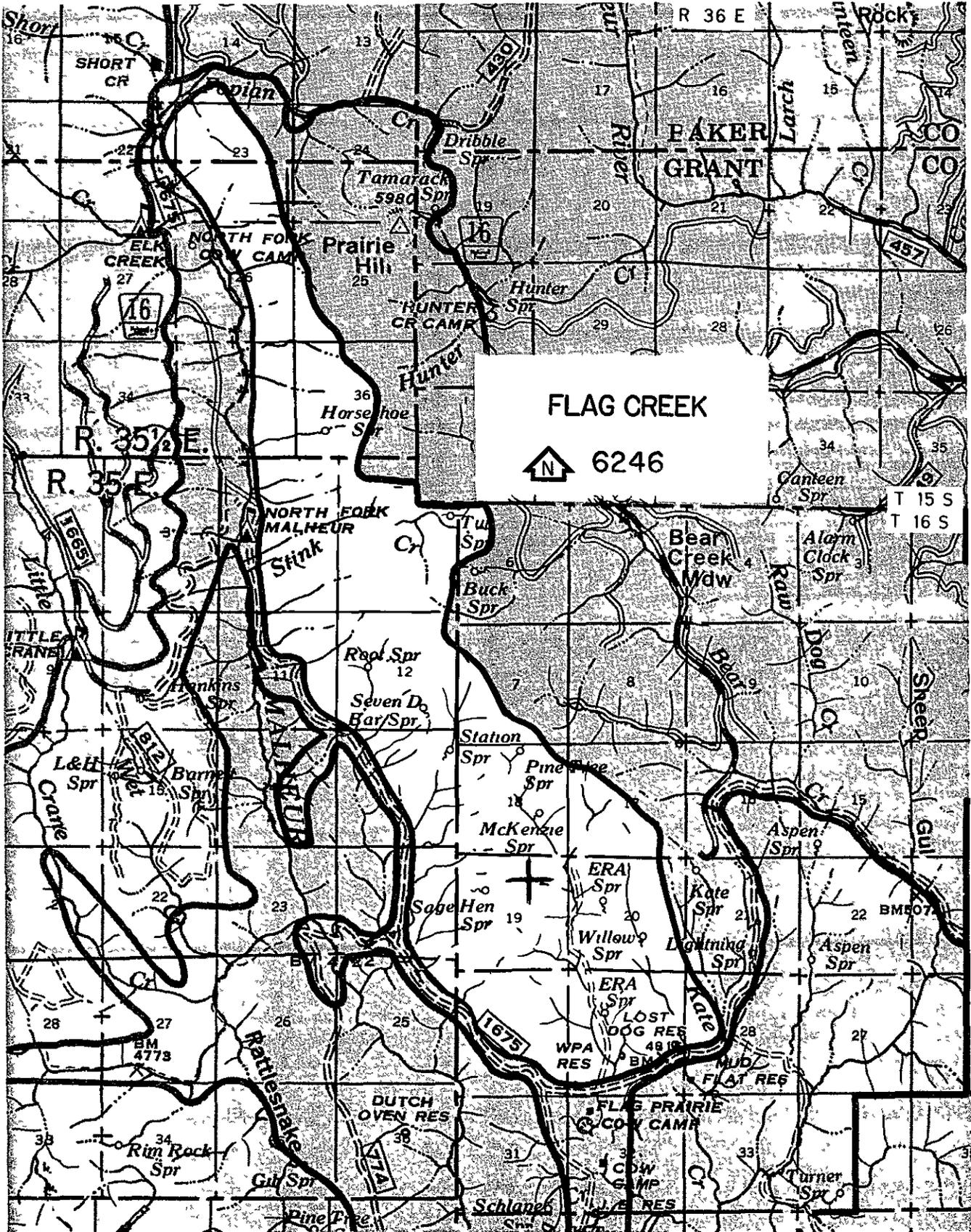


FIGURE C-7



H. FLAG CREEK - 7,789 Acres
(RARE II No. 6246)

1. Description

- a. **History** The area was identified in the RARE process; it was not included in the final designations of the Oregon Wilderness Act. Under the Silvies-Malheur Planning Unit Environmental Impact Statement and the RARE II Environmental Impact Statement this area has been managed for nonwilderness uses.
- b. **Location and Access** This area is located in the center of the Prairie City Ranger District along the North Fork Malheur River (T 15 S , R 35 E., T 15 S , R 35 1/2 E , T. 15 S., R 36 E and T 16 S , R 35 E , T 16 S , R 35 1/2 E., and T 16 S , R. 36 E., of the Willamette Meridian). Access is by secondary Forest road on the west and jeep trails on the east.
- c. **Geography and Topography** The area comprises the eastern slope of the North Fork Malheur River Canyon and some adjoining sage/juniper flats in the northern part of Flag Prairie, with trees in the bottoms and on the sideslopes, and flat gentle ridges with grass and low shrubs. See Figure C-7.
- d. **Geology and Soils** Soils are well drained loams of varying depths, moderate permeability, and containing gravels and cobbles. The entire area is covered with Miocene-age volcanic flow rocks.
- e. **Vegetation** The area is 53 percent forested. Approximately 950 acres meet the Pacific Northwest Region's definition of old growth. The northern two-thirds of the area supports ponderosa pine-associated stands. The southern one-third supports sage/juniper/mountain-mahogany, grasslands, and very scattered ponderosa pine.
- f. **Current Uses** Hunting is the primary recreational use, largely due to the narrow shape of the area and lack of year-round water. Other incidental uses include hiking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling. The potential route of the Pacific Crest-to-Desert Trail follows the river along the western edge.
- The area provides habitat for mule deer, Rocky Mountain elk, cougar, bear, small game, and birds. Additionally, the area includes spring and fall migration routes for elk and deer.
- The area contains portions of two grazing allotments and contributes an average of 450 Animal Unit Months per year.
- The area itself appears untrammelled by human use. It is so narrow that human activities can be seen from nearly everywhere in the area.
- The major attraction is the North Fork Malheur River on the western edge of the area.

2. Wilderness Capability

- a. **Manageability and Boundaries** Boundaries of the area could be adjusted, however, any changes would further diminish the area's size and narrow shape. Exclusion of off-road vehicles in the flatter southern portion of the area may be difficult.

- b. **Natural Integrity** Fire exclusion has enhanced the development of the fir understory in the pine type, and juniper and sage encroachment in the grassland. However, to the untrained eye these effects are too subtle to detect
- c. **Naturalness** The area contains nine miles of fences and corrals and several water developments for livestock. Sagebrush-control activities have occurred in the area. Under natural conditions, low-intensity wildfires would have selectively maintained ponderosa pine understories and grassland instead of sage/juniper.
- d. **Opportunity for Solitude** The opportunities for solitude are very low due to the long, narrow shape of the area and immediate accessibility of the area to roads for its entire length.
- e. **Primitive Recreation and Challenge** Primitive recreation opportunities are also very limited with no opportunity for challenging experiences
- f. **Special Features** No Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plant or animal species exist within the area.
- There are no known cultural resource sites within the area; however, it lies adjacent to a historic nomadic migration route. There are no non-Federal lands within this area.

3. Availability for Wilderness

- a. **Resource Potentials** This area provides semiprimitive motorized recreation opportunities. (See Table C-3.) It has a yearly recreation visitor day capability of about 6,776. (See Table C-4.)
- There are 3,900 acres of forested land which are suitable for timber management activities. These timber stands are primarily mixed conifer with some ponderosa pine and lodgepole pine. The overstory is frequently ponderosa pine with a mixed conifer understory. Average age of the overstories is 140 years; the understories average 65 years. There is a standing volume of 42.39 million board feet (7 41 million cubic feet). With the use of intensive timber management techniques, 187 thousand cubic feet (1,070 thousand board feet) would be contributed to the annual allowable sale quantity in the first decade. The long term sustained yield capacity from this area would be 222 thousand cubic feet per year
- There is no known, locatable mineral potential and no mining claims. The U.S. Geological Survey does not consider the area to have potential for oil and gas or for geothermal resources. There are nine sections with oil and gas leases
- b. **Management Considerations** Indian paint fungus is present and can probably be found in all size classes of true fir. Much of the Douglas-fir (especially on rockier, drier soils) is infected with dwarf-mistletoe. Mistletoe patches of varying severity can be found. Root rots can be found to varying degrees but at present are not considered a problem.

Due to high amounts of Douglas-fir and other fir species in the review area, all the timber stands are highly susceptible to tussock moth and the western spruce budworm. A western spruce budworm infestation of varying severity is presently within the area. Western pine beetle can be found in the area but is generally confined to a few old-growth ponderosa pine trees of low vigor. Mountain pine beetle outbreaks can be found in the lodgepole pine.

There is one administrative site, a transportation right-of-way, and eight sections of acquired land on which mineral rights are reserved until 1990. There are no power withdrawals, irrigation systems, or impoundments (other than small stock ponds) within the area.

4. Wilderness Evaluation

Strawberry Mountain Wilderness lies 10 miles northwest of the area, Monument Rock Wilderness lies 4 miles northeast, North Fork John Day Wilderness lies 40 miles north, and Black Canyon Wilderness lies 60 miles west. The North Fork Malheur Wild and Scenic River is immediately adjacent to the west side of most of the area. The ecosystem types in this area are already represented in these existing wilderness areas.

Bend or Ontario, Oregon, are the nearest minor population centers (130-150 miles); Portland, Oregon or Boise, Idaho are the nearest major population centers (280-180 miles).

In the 1979 RARE II study, the area received 117 responses in favor of wilderness designation, 2,580 preferring further planning status, and 3,409 preferring nonwilderness uses of the area.

In the most recent public involvement activity concerning unroaded areas on the Forest, this area received a low level of response. In addition, those responses were 4 to 1 opposed to wilderness designation of the area.

There have been suggestions to include this area with the North Fork Malheur River area to the southwest and the Monument Rock Wilderness to the northeast as a wilderness "complex." There is also support for retaining the area in roadless status as protection of the river canyon, and a level of concern for the scenic values of this area as seen from the river and nearby roads.

5. Environmental Consequences

Table C-11 displays the various management area assignments to this area by alternative.

In all alternatives 1,070 acres are managed to be within the North Fork Malheur Scenic River corridor, in accordance with the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988, which declared the river to be a part of the Wild and Scenic River System.

The following discussion pertains to those acres outside the river corridor.

- a. **Vegetation/Trees** Significant changes in tree sizes, and stand density and composition are expected in Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, as the overstory is removed and stocking level control is achieved in the understory. As this occurs, the forest characteristics will change to a managed-forest appearance. The amount of old growth retained would range between 108 acres for Alternative B-Modified and 390 acres for Alternative A. Additional old growth may also exist in the semiprimitive motorized acres for Alternative C-Modified. The actual acres affected by timber harvest would vary between Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC. In Alternative F, approximately 1,800 acres would be affected. In the above alternatives, the predominant ponderosa pine overstories would be removed. Risk of loss to insects and/or diseases would be reduced. The estimated standing volume is expected to eventually be harvested in Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, and remain unharvested in Alternative C-Modified.
- b. **Vegetation/Grass and Shrubs** In Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, forage for wildlife and livestock is expected to increase in forested areas when the overstory is removed and the understory is thinned. As tree canopies are opened, native forage plants such as elk sedge, pinegrass, wheatgrass, and fescue will increase naturally. Seeding of introduced forage species will provide higher quality and quantity of palatable plants. In the long term, a gradual decrease in forage plants is expected as the tree canopies again close and shade the understory.
- In Alternative C-Modified forage production is expected to remain at present levels and may decrease as Douglas-fir and white fir further encroach under the ponderosa pine dominated stands.
- c. **Wilderness** Future wilderness consideration would remain a possibility under Alternative C-Modified.
- In Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, users would see timber harvest activities, new road construction, and increased motorized vehicle use. Future wilderness consideration would be foregone by the end of the first decade.
- d. **Recreation** In Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, the recreation experience would be roaded modified with increased vehicle use. The effect on big-game hunting, the primary recreation activity, is expected to be greater hunter success in the short term as hiding cover is reduced by harvest activities and easier road access occurs. In the long term, the opportunity for a remote nonmotorized hunting experience will decrease as more hunting pressure occurs and new access roads are built.
- Alternative C-Modified offers a semiprimitive motorized recreation opportunity which would provide a more natural setting to users than the other alternatives. Moreover, road access during periods other than summer months is expected to be limited by weather and used by more specialized vehicles such as four-wheel drives. All of the alternatives would permit motorized vehicles, including snowmobiles and motorbikes.
- e. **Scenery** Under Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, viewers would see evidence of a managed forest. Long-term effects on scenery would be less old growth to view, more access roads, and less naturalness.

In Alternative C-Modified most of the present scenery would be retained and no noticeable changes are foreseen barring a major outbreak of insects, diseases, or catastrophic fire

- f **Wildlife** Alternative C-Modified would retain the largest acreage of old growth and the most (100 percent) wildlife snags. Under other alternatives, most of the old growth except that designated, would be harvested. Wildlife snag levels would vary between 20 and 60 percent in Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC. Management standards would adequately protect key habitat for all wildlife in all alternatives. The areas designated as old growth in each alternative are expected to meet the minimum requirements of pileated woodpeckers, pine marten, and other wildlife species.
- About 20 percent of the area in the southern portion is considered elk winter range. In Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC, removal of some hiding and thermal cover by harvest activities would increase the amount of forage
- g. **Water, Riparian, Fisheries** The area contains few year-round streams; the major ones are Flag Creek and Stink Creek. Riparian areas and fisheries are also limited in size. All alternatives are considered to be equal in effects on these resources since management standards would adequately protect them. There is no discernible difference between alternatives when management standards are applied
- h **Cultural Resources** All alternatives are similar in effects on cultural resources. There is no discernible difference between alternatives when considering existing regulations, laws, and management standards. Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the resource. They also present the greatest opportunity for discovery and interpretation of cultural resources
- i. **Soils** Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, I, and NC present the greatest risk of inadvertent damage to the soils as well as acceptable amounts of compaction as a result of harvest activities. All of the alternatives adequately protect the resource through application of management standards.

TABLE C-11
 FLAG CREEK MANAGEMENT BY ALTERNATIVE
 (Acres)

MANAGEMENT AREA	NC ^{1/}	Alternatives				
		A	B-Mod	C-Mod	F	I-Preferred
1. General Forest	N/A	2,802	3,084		2,627	2,627
2 Rangeland		2,766	3,037		1,479	1,479
3. Riparian Areas		72	94		66	66
4A. Big-Game Winter Range	N/A				1,635	1,635
4B Big-Game Winter Range Enhancement						
5. Bald Eagle Winter Roost						
6A. Strawberry Mountain Wilderness						
6B Monument Rock Wilderness						
6C Pine Creek						
7. Scenic Area						
8 Special Interest Area						
9. Research Natural Area						
10. Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized						
11. Semi-Primitive Motorized				6,719		
12. Developed Recreation						
13. Old Growth	N/A	390	108		300	300
14. Visual Corridors						
15. Unit Plan Wildlife Emphasis Areas						
16 Minimum Level Management		689	396		612	612
17. Byram Gulch Municipal Supply Watershed						
18. Long Creek Municipal Supply Watershed						
19 Administrative Sites						
20 Wildlife Emphasis Areas with Scheduled Harvest						
21 Wildlife Emphasis Area, Non-Scheduled Harvest						
22. Wild and Scenic River		1,070	1,070	1,070	1,070	1,070
TOTAL ACRES	N/A	7,789	7,789	7,789	7,789	7,789

^{1/}The Timber Management Plan, upon which the No Change Alternative is based, was developed in 1979. The plan was not an integrated plan and, consequently, did not address all resource uses and outputs in an integrated manner. As a result, these acreages are not available.