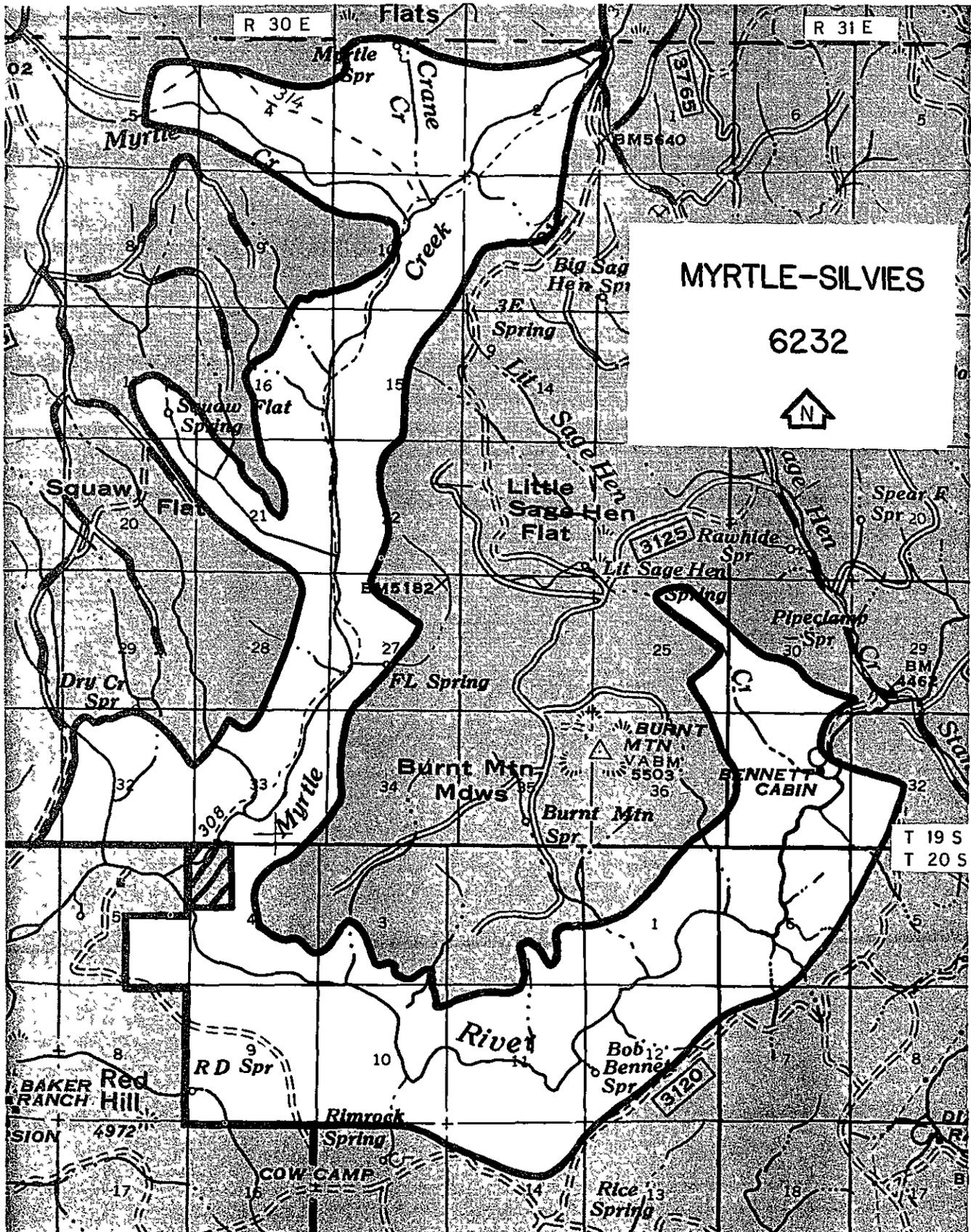


FIGURE C-14



0. MYRTLE-SILVIES - 11,747  
Acres (RARE II No. 6232)

1. Description

- a. History                    This area was inventoried in the RARE process. Under the Silvies-Malheur Planning Unit Environmental Impact Statement and RARE II Environmental Impact Statement, the area has been managed for nonwilderness uses.
- b. Location and Access        The area is located near the southern boundary of the Malheur National Forest in northern Harney County, Oregon (T. 19 S., R. 30 E., T. 20 S., R. 30 E., of the Willamette Meridian). Access consists of unimproved roads to the canyon rims, trails along Myrtle and West Myrtle Creeks in the canyon bottoms, and the "Silvies River Jeep Trail," a four-wheel drive, two-track road which extends approximately 3 miles.
- c. Geography and Topography    The area consists of canyons of the Silvies River and Myrtle Creek drainages. The canyons are fairly wide and very steep with prominent rock outcroppings. The area is a deeply (600 feet plus) incised plateau with a narrow valley (50-200 feet) in the bottom. The canyons average 1 mile from rim-to-rim, with benchlike sideslopes in some areas; long, smooth slopes in others. See Figure C-14.
- d. Geology and Soils            The plateau of table lands at the top of the canyons is formed from a resistant cap of welded tuff about 30-50 feet thick. Below this is a slope-forming, water-laid ash deposit about 40-60 feet deep. Below this is a ledge-forming layer of basalt. Below this basalt is another layer of welded tuff and another ash deposit. These latter layers are permeable materials and where they meet impervious basalt, ground water seeps to the surface. Below these, and for the remaining 400-500 feet, is a series of slope-forming tuffs. On the north- and east-facing slopes, particularly, boulders and blocks of the welded tuff persist from the top of the canyon sidewall to the bottom. The basalt flow also frequently produces a talus slope of loose rock and soil. Miocene-age volcanic-flow rocks outcrop in most of the canyon area, with Miocene- to Pliocene-age tuffaceous sediments in the canyon toward the south. Pliocene-age welded tuff is exposed in higher elevations, and some Pliocene-age tuffaceous sediments are found in the extreme southern portion of the area.
- e. Vegetation                This area is 79 percent forested. According to the Pacific Northwest Region's definition of old growth, about 200 of these acres are old-growth forest. Sideslopes on the west side of Myrtle Canyon have pine and fir with a grass, forb, and shrub understory. The east side of Myrtle Canyon is ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir with grass and sedge. Also found on the east side are numerous areas of juniper, sagebrush, and bunchgrass. The north slopes along the Silvies Canyon support ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir with fir understories intermingled with mountain-mahogany.
- f. Current Uses              Big-game hunting, and fishing for trout and small-mouth bass are currently the primary recreational uses of the area. Other uses include Silvies River rafting or canoeing during the spring high-water periods, picnicking, camping, hiking, recreational gold panning, photography, and nature study. All recreational use in the area is light. Access is limited to trails that follow the streamcourses; these are generally at a gentle grade and suitable for an average hiker.

Approximately 1,900 Recreation Visitor Days occur annually, with approximately 75 percent of these being in a semiprimitive setting and 25 percent being in a roaded natural setting.

This area provides year-round Rocky Mountain elk habitat with winter range encompassing the entire area. Mule deer are in the area during spring, summer, and fall. The canyon rims provide habitat for black bear, bobcat, Canadian geese, prairie falcon, and turkey vulture. The area provides for a wide spectrum of wildlife viewing, as the canyons support riparian, cliff, and montane habitat (including old growth) in close proximity. Most bird and mammal species associated with the southern Blue Mountains can be found in the area.

The area lies within 4 grazing allotments. Current use averages about 500 Animal Unit Months annually by cattle.

The canyon bottom provides a pleasant, remote area with free-flowing streams and views of an undisturbed ecological system. The canyon walls range from rock walls to smooth sideslopes. Some talus slopes are visible from the creek bottom. Myrtle Creek has large old-growth forest stands while the Silvies River canyon has more open slopes and stringers of trees.

The predominant high points adjacent to the area are Burnt Mountain Lookout (abandoned) and West Myrtle Butte Lookout (currently in service during fire season). The southern boundary of the area is adjacent to private land.

The major attraction of this area, in addition to hunting and fishing opportunities, is simply a place to "get away from it all" and enjoy "peace and quiet without motorized intrusions."

## 2. Wilderness Capability

### a. Manageability and Boundaries

There is general agreement that the boundaries of the area should be adjusted. The boundaries of the original inventoried review area are difficult to locate on-the-ground and would be extremely difficult to manage. There is not consensus on where adjusted boundaries should be located. Moving the boundary to the canyon rims would improve locatability and manageability of the area by following topographic characteristics, but would also reduce the size of the area by about 2,080 acres.

### b. Natural Integrity

Within the river canyons themselves, natural integrity of the area is extremely high. Natural processes have been virtually unhampered by human activities with the exception of trail maintenance, livestock grazing, fire management, one unimproved road, and camping and associated activities.

Fire suppression in the area has caused a gradual change in the understory vegetation from ponderosa pine to white fir and other tree species. Under natural conditions, low intensity wildfires would have selectively maintained ponderosa pine in the understories.

The effects of grazing in the area are mostly concentrated along streams. They include fences, salt grounds, cattle trails, some compaction and vegetative trampling, dust beds, the cattle themselves, and other evidence of their presence along the streams.

There is one unimproved jeep track for several miles along the Silvies River. This is utilized for only one mile until after spring runoff, at which time it is possible to travel an additional two miles of the track with off-road vehicles.

c Naturalness

Overall, the area appears extremely natural to the average user. The effects of fire suppression would not normally be noticed by most users. The impact of the unimproved road along the Silvies River is localized to that area. Foot trails along streams are maintained to a fairly low standard.

The impacts of livestock grazing remain the most intrusive activity. These appear unnatural to most visitors and would be extremely difficult to mitigate unless grazing were eliminated. Livestock grazing occurs in the portion of the area most likely to receive a majority of visitor use.

d Opportunity for Solitude

Within the canyons, opportunities for solitude are very high, especially along stream bottoms. The depth of the canyons and the vegetative cover provide excellent screening. Rim tops offer limited opportunity for solitude and viewing the canyons. The views give an impression of a vast, unspoiled canyon area, but intrusions from the adjacent table lands occur, especially during hunting season.

e Primitive Recreation and Challenge

Overall, Primitive recreation opportunities are limited by the narrowness and irregular shape of the area. Topographic and vegetative cover are significant over much of the area, and trails tend to concentrate users in stream bottoms or on canyon rims.

Trails are the only recreation facility present and they are low standard. They are not difficult, however, as they follow the moderate stream grade.

The lack of facilities and access does tend to increase opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation. Challenge to physical ability would be classified as moderate to high, particularly for the areas with rock cliffs and very steep slopes.

f. Special Features

There is scenic variety both vertically, from ridgetops to canyon bottoms, and horizontally as the scene changes among microhabitats.

Much of the timber in the canyons provides old growth. No Threatened or Endangered Species are known to use the area, however, there is a potential for bald eagle winter roosts at the mouth of both Silvies and Myrtle Canyons. No Sensitive species are known to occur in the area.

Myrtle and Silvies Canyons were occupied by Native Americans at various times. A cultural resource survey was conducted in Myrtle Canyon in 1980, isolated chips and flakes were found. No historic sites were found. There is a high probability of locating additional prehistoric sites in the Silvies River Canyon because of its proximity to Silvies Valley. The canyon bottoms along Myrtle and West Myrtle Creeks also have as high potential for locating cultural resources.

3. Availability for Wilderness

a Resource Potential

Currently the area provides roaded modified, roaded natural and semiprimitive motorized recreation opportunities. (See Table C-3.) This area has a potential of 21,852 Recreation Visitor Days per year. See Table C-4.

There are 7,200 acres of forested land suitable for timber management activities. These trees are predominantly ponderosa pine and mixed conifer species growing in multistoried stands. The average age of the overstory is 140, the average age of the understory is 60. There is a standing volume of 92.1 million board feet (16.10 million cubic feet). With the use of intensive timber management techniques, 346 thousand cubic feet (1,979 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 410 thousand cubic feet per year.

The area has no known potential for locatable minerals and contains no mining claims, although four claims are located close to the eastern boundary. The U.S. Geological Survey does not consider it to be prospectively valuable for oil and gas. An industry respondent has identified the area as having moderate potential for oil. There are seven sections under oil and gas leases.

b Management  
Considerations

The western spruce budworm can be found throughout the entire area. In those areas inhabited primarily with fir, infestation is quite severe. Much of the Douglas-fir is infected with dwarf-mistletoe, especially that found on the drier slopes of Myrtle Canyon. Myrtle Canyon also has numerous old-growth ponderosa pine trees that have been killed by western pine beetle.

There are no special-use permits or other special land use authorizations in the area. There is one ditch or canal right-of-way that was retained for the "Bennett Cabin" property when it was deeded to the Forest Service. There are no planned power withdrawals, proposed impoundments, existing irrigation reservoirs, or distribution systems. There are no known non-Federal lands in the review area.

4. Wilderness  
Evaluation

The Strawberry Mountain Wilderness is 30 miles northeast, Monument Rock Wilderness is 55 miles northeast, North Fork John Day Wilderness is 75 miles northeast, and Black Canyon Wilderness is 45 miles northwest. The ecosystems of this area are represented in the Black Canyon Wilderness.

The nearest major metropolitan centers are Portland, Oregon (300 miles northwest), and Boise, Idaho (180 miles east).

There is no consensus about the best use of the Myrtle-Silvies area. In the 1979 RARE II study, this area received 144 comments favoring wilderness designation, 2,590 comments favoring further planning, and 3,395 comments favoring nonwilderness management activities. During recent Forest planning public involvement, this area was among those receiving a high level of response. That response echoed the lack of consensus with a ratio of 1 to 1.6, favoring wilderness.

The primary reasons favoring wilderness for this area were the solitude and opportunities for primitive recreation. The naturalness of the area was a strong factor, as was protection of fish and wildlife habitat.

The primary reasons opposing wilderness for this area were the value of the timber resource, evidence of human activity, and difficulty of managing the boundaries of the area.

There was strong support from all respondents for protecting the river canyons.

There was a comment that if the area is declared wilderness, the private land to the south will suffer from public use.

**5. Environmental Consequences**

Table C-18 displays the various management area assignments for this area by alternative

**a. Vegetation/Trees**

It is expected that the trees will be harvested in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC. As this occurs, tree size, stand density, and composition will change to a managed forest appearance. The actual amount of timber harvested would vary by alternative. Old growth designated for wildlife will be retained on about 1,200 acres in Alternatives A and B-Modified. Alternative NC would retain approximately 830 acres. Additional old growth may occur outside designated areas in other management areas.

The effects of harvesting would be less in Alternatives F and I, especially from the water's edge up to the canyon breaks which would not be harvested. Alternative C-Modified would affect trees the least of all alternatives. No timber harvest would occur in this alternative.

**b. Vegetation/Grass and Shrubs**

The greatest change in forage for livestock and wildlife is expected in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC, within forested areas. When overstory trees are removed and the remaining trees thinned, significant increases are expected in forage production. In areas supporting fir trees, there will be large increases in forage production with a long-term gradual decrease as tree canopies again close and shade the understory. Seeding of introduced grass species will provide higher quality and quantity of palatable plants and change the present grass species composition. Native bunchgrasses and shrubs will increase naturally as tree canopies are opened and thinning occurs in harvest areas.

There will be less change in grasses and shrubs in Alternatives F and I and even less change in Alternative C-Modified. The amount of change is directly proportional to the amount of acres harvested.

**c. Wilderness**

Future wilderness consideration, based upon size of area, would be least affected by Alternative C-Modified, followed by Alternatives F and I. By the end of the first decade, future wilderness consideration would be foregone in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC. Motorized vehicle use would be permitted in Alternatives A, B-Modified, F, and NC.

**d. Recreation**

The recreation opportunity varies in alternatives from semiprimitive nonmotorized in Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I, to roaded modified in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC.

In a semiprimitive nonmotorized setting, within the canyons users would experience natural surroundings without motorized intrusion. Eventually more trails may be constructed to accommodate more users and existing trails improved to a higher standard. The primary recreation opportunities of fishing and big-game hunting would remain unchanged.

Within a roaded modified setting, there would be increased vehicle use and sounds on timber access roads constructed along the canyon rims or river benches. Removal of old-growth ponderosa pine would cause the area to appear unnatural and provide for higher hunter success due to reduced hiding cover.

- e. Scenery
- The scenic views of the canyon would be retained under Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I. Under Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC, viewers would see evidence of a managed forest as the canyon slopes are harvested and timber access roads are constructed. Long-term effects on scenery would be less old growth to view, more access roads, and less naturalness.
- In Alternatives C-Modified, F, and I, most of the present scenery would be maintained and no significant changes are foreseen barring a major outbreak of insects, diseases, or catastrophic fire, except for approximately 1,900 acres above the canyon rim which would be developed in these alternatives
- In all other alternatives, the scenery viewed from the bottom of the canyon would remain unchanged.
- f. Wildlife
- Old-growth timber and snags would be available to nongame wildlife to a greater extent in Alternative C-Modified, lesser in Alternatives F and I, and least in Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC. Management standards would adequately protect key habitats for all wildlife under all alternatives. Old growth is designated in all alternatives to meet the needs of pileated woodpeckers and other wildlife. The area is completely within elk winter range. Removal of some hiding and thermal cover by harvest activities increases forage on winter range.
- g. Water, Riparian, Fisheries
- Myrtle Creek and Silvies River would be the most affected by Alternatives A, B-Modified, and NC through timber harvest activities, although management standards would adequately protect these resources under all alternatives. There would be increased accessibility and use as a result of timber harvest and road construction. All other alternatives are considered to be equal in effects as harvest activities would occur outside the canyon and away from streamside areas.
- h. Cultural Resources
- Those alternatives with the most development present the greatest risk for inadvertent damage to the resource. Because of greater activity, they also present the greatest opportunity for discovery of cultural resources. There is no discernible difference between alternatives when considering existing laws, regulations, and management standards which specifically protect them.
- i. Soils
- All alternatives are similar in effects on soils. There is no discernible difference between alternatives when considering existing regulations, laws, and management standards.

TABLE C-18  
 MYRTLE-SILVIES MANAGEMENT BY ALTERNATIVE  
 (Acres)

Management Area	NC <sup>1/</sup>	Alternatives				
		A	B-Mod	C-Mod	F	I-Preferred
1. General Forest			6,115		873	873
2. Rangeland		2,587	2,808		194	194
3. Riparian Areas		489	493		93	93
4A Big game Winter Range					590	590
4B. Big game Winter Range Enhancement						
5. Bald Eagle Winter Roost	N/A	537	537			
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				11,747	9,855	9,855
11. Semi-Primitive Motorized						
12 Developed Recreation						
13 Old Growth	N/A	1,200	1,200			
14 Visual Corridors		131				
15 Unit Plan Wildlife Emphasis Areas	N/A	6,020				
16 Minimum Level Management		783	594		142	142
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						
TOTAL ACRES	N/A	11,747	11,747	11,747	11,747	11,747

<sup>1/</sup>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.