

## **Executive Summary**

This report documents the information and analysis procedure used for the Malheur National Forest-scale roads analysis. The analysis area included Ochoco National Forest lands that were formerly the Snow Mountain Ranger District, which are now administered by the Malheur as part of the Emigrant Ranger District. This analysis process resulted in identifying a group of roads that are recommended as the minimum primary system road system for the Forest. The analysis was designed to provide decision-makers with information needed to develop road systems that are safe and responsive to public needs and desires, are affordable and efficiently managed, have minimal negative ecological effects on the land, and are more in balance with available funding for needed management actions.

Environmental issues potentially affected by road management proposals, such as soil and water resources, ecological processes, invasive species spread, and biological communities:

- This Forest-scale roads analysis identified the recommended minimum primary road system, which comprises 22% of the existing Forest road system. It also identified the relative watershed and aquatics risks of each road or road segment that is included in the recommended minimum primary road system.
- The potential environmental impacts of the remaining 78% of the Forest road system needs to be evaluated and prioritized during future analyses at a sub-forest scale. This Forest-scale analysis included assessing relative watershed and aquatics risks of Forest Lands at sub-watershed scale (6<sup>th</sup> Level HUC). Those risk ratings are intended to help prioritize future sub-Forest scale analyses. Chapter 4 provides more detailed information on road related environmental impacts.
- The Malheur Forest Plan provides direction to address road related concerns for fish and wildlife by establishing open road density goals of no greater than 3.2 miles/square mile in summer range, 2.2 miles/square in winter range, and 1.5 miles/square mile in wildlife emphasis areas by the end of the first decade (1999). The Forest has generally met those open road density goals, as the plan indicates road densities are to be monitored and evaluated on a watershed basis (5<sup>th</sup> level HUC). However, there are still many subwatersheds (6<sup>th</sup> level HUC) that have open road densities that exceed these levels. The plan also states that access management planning will strive for 1.5 miles/square mile on summer range and 1.0 miles/square mile on winter range as a long-term goal, “unless these densities do not allow for a healthy and productive forest as envisioned in the desired future condition, or interfere with access to private land.”

- The Forest road system provides a significant vector for the spread of exotic plant species and noxious weeds, which is an increasing problem and concern on National Forest System lands as well as adjacent lands.
- The most important road related environmental issue is the effects of roads on aquatic resources in general, and specifically Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive aquatic species (bull trout, mid-Columbia steelhead, and Columbia spotted fog). The magnitude of those effects is largely dependent on how well the roads are maintained.
- Sub-Forest road analyses need to continue to strive to meet long-range road density goals by identifying opportunities to reduce both open road densities and total road densities. Those results of those efforts will should focus on reducing the amount of funding needed for road maintenance, reducing road related impacts to fish and wildlife, and reducing the spread of exotic plants and noxious weeds.

**Social issues potentially affected by road management proposals such as socio-economic impacts, public access, and accessibility for handicapped persons:**

The public is concerned about road-related decisions being made without public involvement, particularly road closures and decommissioning.

- This Forest-scale roads analysis does not make any recommendations to close or decommission roads. Any decisions to close or decommission roads, open currently closed roads, or construct new roads will occur only through NEPA decisions. The NEPA process will allow the opportunity for public involvement and be based on site-specific analyses.
- This Forest-scale roads analysis does recommend:
  1. Opening approximately 7 miles of roads that are currently closed;
  2. Increasing the Operational Maintenance Levels of approximately 40 miles of road from Level 2 (High-clearance vehicles) to Level 3 (Low-clearance vehicles);
  3. Decreasing the Operational Maintenance Levels of approximately 640 miles of road from Level 3 (Low-clearance vehicles) to Level 2 (High-clearance vehicles)

**Evaluation of transportation rights-of-way acquisition needs:**

The timber program projected in the 1990 Forest Plans will require some additional primary access roads and associated rights-of-way, however, depending on the outcome of the Forest Plan Revision, the need for timber or other motorized access could change. Consideration of every small, local area that may have a need of right-of-way acquisition should be done with analyses at the sub-Forest scale. This analysis did identify four relatively large Forest areas outside of inventoried roadless areas that have no little or no

- The Forest currently has no right-of-way to allow use of road 4795, which is a collector road that provides accesses lands in and around the Utley Butte Wildlife Emphasis Area on the Emigrant District (the prior right-of-way has been terminated).

Interrelationship of State, County, Tribal, and other Federal agency transportation facility effects on land and resource management plans and resource management programs:

The primary access routes to both public and private lands within and adjacent to the analysis area are Federal and State Highways and County roads, some of which traverse into or through the National Forest. These Highways and County roads give communities, tourists, and industries access to the National Forest. These roads also connect to Forest arterial, collector, and some local roads at or near the Forest boundary, which disperse traffic into the Forest for a variety of uses. A number of Forest roads also serve as primary through-routes that connect communities. Virtually all of the local Forest roads connect to Forest collector and arterial roads, or directly to County roads, State and Federal Highways.

This network of Highways, County roads, and Forest roads are especially important to the smaller communities around the Forest Lands. Many people in the communities listed in the following table rely on access to the Forest for their livelihood as well as for recreation.

ES-Table 1-- Small residential communities near Lands administered by the Malheur National Forest

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>GRANT COUNTY</b>  | Austin, Canyon City, Dayville, Fox, Galena, Izee, John Day, Long Creek, Monument, Prairie City, Seneca, Silvies |
| <b>HARNEY COUNTY</b> | Burns, Drewsey, Hines   |
| <b>BAKER COUNTY</b>  | Granite, Greenhorn, Unity, Whitney  |

Transportation investments necessary for meeting resource management plans and programs:

Many arterial and collector roads have not been reconstructed, or are not being maintained to the standards that were envisioned in the 1990 Forest Plans. The amount of funding and opportunities available to complete annual maintenance needs has drastically declined over the past decade. As a result the Forest has a large backlog of deferred maintenance needs, which continues to grow in magnitude.

- A review of existing RMOs reveals that many of them should be reviewed and revised. This process could result in lowering standards on many roads to reflect

current road uses, which would help reduce the amount of funding needed to meet standards.

- Current and future sub-Forest level (watershed or project) roads analyses are expected to further reduce the Forest road maintenance obligations, as a result of decommissioning roads that are no longer needed and closing some roads that are currently open. However, these reductions are not expected to be significant enough to balance recent funding levels with the continuing overall road maintenance needs on the Forest

**Current and likely future funding levels available to support road construction, maintenance, and decommissioning:**

For 2004, the allocated road maintenance budget for planning, construction, and maintenance of roads is estimated at \$790,000 (The budget allocation averaged about \$1,000,000 per year from 1997 to 2002). This funding covers many aspects of road maintenance and management including the organization necessary to accomplish the overall program and associated overhead costs. In the past two years the Forest has been able to supplement road maintenance funding through the Title II funding program (approximately \$290,000 in 2002, and \$440,000 in 2004). But that potential funding source will expire in 2006 unless the program is extended or renewed.

Appropriated road funding has historically been supplemented to varying degrees by road construction and maintenance work performed by timber purchasers through the commercial timber sale program. That program and the associated funding opportunities have declined drastically in the past decade.

There are other potential funding sources discussed in the Forest-scale roads analysis report that could also provide some relief, but the projected costs to maintain the entire road system to standard are much higher than the current and likely future funding levels can support.