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CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

Introduction

Insert in FEIS page 1.

This draft environmental impact statement supplements the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects final environmental impact statement (FEIS) released May 2003. This draft supplemental statement documents additional information and effects disclosure and displays where specific changes are incorporated into the May 2003 FEIS; therefore the two environmental impact statement documents must be thought of, and used together, as if they are one statement.

The May 2003 Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects final environmental impact statement and this draft supplemental environmental impact statement can be viewed or downloaded from the following internet site <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/projects/readroom/>. Paper copies of both statements are available upon request by contacting the Heppner Ranger District.

Treaties

No change from FEIS

Location

No change from FEIS

Background

Insert in FEIS, page 5, after Changes from DEIS

Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Heppner District Ranger Andrei Rykoff issued a final environmental impact statement for the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects in May 2003 and signed the Record of Decision on May 21, 2003. He selected Alternative 5 which included commercial and noncommercial thinning, shelterwood harvest, landscape-scale prescribed burning, aspen restoration, repair of instream structures, temporary road construction, and other management projects.

The decision was appealed and after reviewing the appeal, Ranger Rykoff decided to withdraw a portion of his decision. The August 14, 2003 withdrawal included all commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning activities planned in the Monument Big Game Winter Range (Management Area C3). All other aspects of the May 21, 2003 decision were affirmed by the Regional Forester on August 21, 2003 and are being implemented.

A review of the May 2003 final EIS revealed some project activities may not be fully consistent with a forest plan standard concerning habitat effectiveness index (HEI) in the C3 management area. Activities not consistent with a forest plan standard require a forest plan amendment to permit implementation. Since Ranger Rykoff does not have authority to amend the Forest Plan, Forest Supervisor Jeff D. Blackwood becomes the Responsible Official.

To fully address the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects purpose and need, Supervisor Blackwood decided to move forward with the remaining actions (commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning) in the C3 management area. A notice of intent to supplement the final environmental impact statement for the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects using a draft supplemental environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register (February 17, 2004).

This draft supplemental environmental impact statement adds new information, analysis, and effects disclosure relevant to the forest plan amendment and other decisions to be made within the C3 management area of the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects. Only additions to the FEIS are disclosed in the draft supplemental environmental impact statement.

The supplemental environmental impact statement process will follow procedures in 40 CFR 1500-1508 and forest service handbook 1909.15. This draft supplemental EIS will be made available for a 45 day comment period. After considering comments received, Supervisor Blackwood will base his decisions on the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects May 2003 final EIS as supplemented by the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects final supplemental EIS. Supervisor Blackwood will document his decision in a Record of Decision that will be subject to appeal following procedures described in 36 CFR 215.

Purpose and Need for Action

Insert in FEIS on page 10 following the first bulleted statement and before the Proposed Action section.

Forest Plan Amendment

The existing habitat effectiveness index for the Monument winter range is 67. Implementation of the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects proposed action or alternative actions would result in a habitat effectiveness index of 67 across the winter range. Although there is no anticipated change in habitat effectiveness index, an index of no less than 70 as described for the C3-Big Game Winter Range management area (Forest Plan, page 4-152) would not be achieved by the action alternatives. The method prescribed for the calculation of Habitat Effectiveness Indices is described in Appendix C of the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan, page 4-152 currently reads:

“Elk habitat will be managed on designated big game winter ranges to achieve a habitat effectiveness index of no less than 70, including discounts for open roads to motorized vehicular traffic, as described in Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests (Thomas and others 1979). The habitat effectiveness standard will be measured on an individual winter range basis.”

The purpose of and need for action (FEIS Pages 5-10) remains valid for the C3 Monument winter range. However, actions not consistent with a forest plan standard require a forest plan amendment to permit implementation.

As a result of these conditions there is a need to:

- Follow through and address the site specific purpose and needs stated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, pages 5-10 in the C3 Monument winter range
- Amend the forest plan to bring the actions into consistency with the Forest Plan (as amended).

Proposed Action

Insert in FEIS on page 11 following the last bulleted statement under Aspen and before the Management Direction heading.

Forest Plan Amendment

The Forest Supervisor proposes to amend the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) following procedures described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12. The amendment would change the habitat effectiveness index (HEI) from 70 to 67 (Forest Plan, page 4-152) only in the Monument winter range and the site-specific project called Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects.

Management Direction

No change from FEIS.

Decision to be Made

Insert in FEIS page 12 after the second sentence in the last paragraph.

Heppner District Ranger Andrei Rykoff issued a final environmental impact statement for the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects in May 2003 and signed the Record of Decision on May 21, 2003. He selected Alternative 5 which included commercial and noncommercial thinning, shelterwood harvest, landscape-scale prescribed burning, aspen restoration, repair of instream structures, temporary road construction, and other management projects.

The May 21, 2003 decision was appealed and after reviewing the appeal, Ranger Rykoff decided to withdraw a portion of his decision. The withdrawal included all commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning activities planned in the Monument Big Game Winter Range management area (Letter dated August 14, 2003). All other aspects of the May 21, 2003 decision were affirmed by the Regional Forester (Letter dated August 21, 2003) and are being implemented.

Insert in FEIS page 12 before first bulleted statement.

- Whether or not to amend the Land and Resource Management Plan habitat effectiveness index standard for this site-specific project.
- Whether or not to implement the commercial harvest and non-commercial thinning activities within the Monument Big Game Winter Range management area as described in the alternatives (FEIS Chapter 2, pages 23-46).

Scoping Process _____

Insert in FEIS on page 13 following the third complete paragraph and before the Key Issues section.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to supplement the Rimrock EIS was published in the Federal Register on February 17, 2004. The NOI asked for public comment through March 15, 2004 on the proposal to amend the Forest Plan habitat effectiveness index standard for elk habitat. Letters announcing the NOI were mailed to 162 interested groups, individuals, permittees, and to local, state, and tribal governments on February 11, 2004.

Key Issues _____

No change from the FEIS

Other Issues Considered _____

Insert in FEIS on page 20 following the Species of Interest section and before the heading: Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis.

Forest Plan Amendment

The existing habitat effectiveness index for the Monument Winter Range is 67. Implementation of the Rimrock Ecosystem Restoration Projects proposed action or alternative actions located in the C3 management area would result in a habitat effectiveness index of 67 across the winter range, which is not consistent with the Forest Plan. Although the current HEI would not change after activities have been completed, a Forest Plan amendment will be necessary for the project to move forward.

Several commenters representing environmental groups stated that additional analysis should be conducted before the Forest Plan is amended. The analysis should address all aspects of elk habitat including the percent of total, satisfactory, effective and marginal cover in the area before and after the plan is amended. They believe because HEI was already below Forest Plan standards, any additional proposed activities will further degrade big game habitat and jeopardize the elk population in the area.

Concern was expressed over the fact that other projects planned within the C3 Monument Big Game Winter Range will also require a Forest Plan amendment. Respondents believe there will be cumulative effects associated with a Forest Plan amendment for each project and any changes in HEI should be amended at a broader scale.

Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis _____

No changes from the FEIS.

Project Record _____

Insert in FEIS, page 21 after the last paragraph.

All records and analysis of this Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement are incorporated into the Rimrock Ecosystems Restoration Projects' Final Environmental Impact Statement project record.

