A.J. Dwyer Input for Wildwood-Wemme Highway Widening Project

Prepared by:
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Affected Environment: The A. J. Dwyer Scenic Area is a five-acre parcel of land located in Township 2 South, Range 7 East, Section 31 and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The parcel is to the north of and adjacent to U.S. Highway 26 and immediately across from the entrance of the Wildwood Recreation site. The area north of Hwy 26 is surrounded on all sides by private ownership. The A.J. Dwyer parcel was designated a Special Area in the BLM's 1995 Salem District Resource Management Plan with scenic and botanical values as the identified unique features. This parcel is managed under a Class I Visual Resource Management (VRM) category which calls for the preservation of the character of the landscape. The A.J. Dwyer parcel is also within the Mt. Hood Corridor, a Congressionally designated scenic area which requires that scenic values be protected on BLM lands that can be seen from U.S. Highway 26. Though designated as a scenic area, the A.J. Dwyer parcel is relatively small in size with approximately 0.27 mile of the parcel adjacent to U.S. Highway 26.

There are several large older trees on the parcel, most of which are located along or near the highway. Apart from the older forest adjacent to the highway, the truly unique botanical values at the A. J. Dwyer Scenic Area include a diverse group of lichens and vascular plants north of the proposed project area. Although the area is host to vascular plant and moss species that are typically found in dryer upland environments, it is also host to a variety of lichens that are typically found in high humidity environments associated with riparian areas. With its dry, well drained volcanic soils that were not seen elsewhere in this parcel, and its diverse botanical community, this area stands out as unique.

The general habitat around the A.J. Dwyer parcel is characterized by a forested setting intermixed with houses and roads, with utilities along Hwy 26. No houses are directly adjacent to the part of the A.J. Dwyer parcel that would be disturbed and Wildwood Park is opposite the area and directly across Hwy 26. The proposed project area is most visible from the Hwy 26 with little visibility from houses in the general area due to the screening provided by the trees and brush in the northern end of the A. J. Dwyer parcel. Whether traveling east or west on Hwy 26, the proposed project area is only visible in the peripheral view for a few seconds. Except while exiting their driveways, the proposed project area would not be visible to residents living along the south side of Hwy 26.

Environmental Effects: A strip approximately 0.27-mile in length adjacent to U.S. Highway 26 would be cleared of trees and vegetation, which includes most of the larger trees in the A.J. Dwyer parcel. The width of the strip would vary from 25 to 50 feet. Approximately 65 trees over 24 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) would be removed, including an estimated 22 older and larger trees that are greater than 40 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh).

The diverse group of lichens and vascular plants in the northern portion of the A.J. Dwyer parcel would not be disturbed as a result of the proposed project.

There would be some visual disturbance over several months during the construction period. Following the completion of the project, the general character of the parcel would continue to be dominated by a forested setting, however, the area would appear more open with younger and smaller trees. Given that a forested setting would be maintained and the short amount of time the parcel is in view while traveling U.S. Highway 26, the proposed project is expected to be in compliance with management objectives associated with the AJ Dwyer Scenic Area and the Mt. Hood Corridor.

Cumulative Effects: There are no other projects expected that would affect the A.J. Dwyer Scenic Area. Cumulative effects associated with the proposed action as a whole will be addressed by the Oregon Department of Transportation in their Environmental Assessment for the project.

Visual Contrast Rating Worksheet[1]

Section A: Project Information

Date: 4/25/2003 **District:** Salem **Resource Area:** Cascades

Activity: Highway widening project

Location: T.2S., R.7 E Sect. 31 – AJ Dwyer Scenic Area

Location Sketch: See Attached Viewpoint Photos taken from the South Side of U.S. Highway 26 facing the AJ Dwyer Scenic Area.

Project Name: Wildwood to Wemme Highway Widening **VRM Class:** I

Key Observation Points: From south side of U. S. Highway 26 towards the project area

Weather: Clear and sunny.

Section B: Characteristic Landscape Description[2]

Land/Water

Form: Relatively flat in FG and larger mountains in the MG and BG.
Line: Horizontal lines in FG and undulating rounded lines in the MG and BG, following mountain shapes.
Color: Soils generally covered by vegetation, medium brown where exposed.
Texture: Unseen.

Vegetation

Form: Relatively homogenous form of trees in FG, MG and BG that follows land forms.
Line: Vertical lines of tree boles in FG and jagged tree line running horizontal and slanted, following the shape of the land form in MG and BG.
Color: Darker green where there are older conifer trees and medium green with younger conifer trees and a lighter green for hardwoods and grass in FG. Darker green with trees covering slopes in MG and BG.
Texture: Clumpy and courser in the FG and less course when looking at trees covering slopes in MG and BG.

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[1] Information provided for Form 8400-4
[2] FG = Foreground, MG = Middle Ground, BG = Background

Structure

Form: Layers of horizontal/rectangular shapes in FG associated with highway, guard rails and utility lines. Glimpses of rectangular shaped houses can be seen through the trees in MG.

Line: Horizontal lines associated with highway, guardrails and utility lines in FG. Vertical lines associated with utility poles in FG. No identifiable lines for MG.

Color: Grayish-Black for highway, grey for guard rails in FG. Brown for the power line structure in FG. Glimpses of houses appear lighter colored in MG.

Texture: Smooth for highway, utilities and guardrails in FG and for glimpses of houses in MG.

Section C: Proposed Activity Description[3]

Proposed Activity: Thinning of Units B-4 and B-5

Land/Water

Form: No change expected in short term or long term.

Line: No change expected in short term or long term.

Color: Some soil may be exposed in short term during construction period, with vegetation returning to cover it in long term.

Texture: No change expected in short term or long term.

Vegetation

Form: Low change in short term, with the general area appearing more open but with a forested setting still maintained. Changes would decrease in long term as remaining trees mature.

Line: No change expected in the short or long term given that there would still be trees exhibiting vertical lines, just younger and smaller.

Color: Low change in short term, with much of the forested canopy would still be in place, however the darker green older trees would no long be observable. Changes would decrease in long term as remaining trees mature.

Texture: No change expected in short term or long term given that a forested setting would still be maintained.

Structure

Form: No change

Line: No change

Color: No change expected except an improvement because more visually sensitive weathering guard rails would be added to blend in with landscape.

Texture: No change

[3] FG = Foreground, MG = Middle Ground, BG = Background

Section D: Contrast Rating - Both Short Term and Long Term

1. Degree of Contrast

Elements	Land/Water Body	Vegetation	Structures
Form	None	Low	None
Line	None	None	None
Color	None	Low	None
Texture	None	None	None

2. Does project meet visual resource management objectives (see comments): Yes

3. Additional Mitigation Measures Recommended (see mitigation measures): No

Comments from Item 2:

- A strip approximately 0.27-mile in length adjacent to U.S. Highway 26 would be cleared of trees and vegetation, which includes most of the larger trees in the parcel.
- The width of the strip would vary from 25 to 50 feet.
- Speed limit is 45 mph, so area is only in view for seconds in the peripheral view of drivers when traveling east or west along U.S. Highway 26.
- No houses appear to directly face the parcel given that it is across from Wildwood Recreation Site.
- Visual simulations completed by ODOT indicate that most of the larger trees would be removed, but that the area would still retain the appearance of a forested setting.

Additional Mitigating Measures from Item 3: None

Evaluator's Name: Laura Dowlan, Outdoor Recreation Planner Date: 4/25/2006

Wildwood-Wemme Highway Project
VRM Key Observation Area Photos

From south side of Highway 26 facing northeast towards AJ Dwyer Scenic Area

From south side of Highway 26 facing northeast towards AJ Dwyer Scenic Area

Photos taken 4/25/2006 by Laura Dowlan

Wildwood-Wemme Highway Project
VRM Key Observation Area Photos

From south side of Highway 26 facing northwest towards AJ Dwyer Scenic Area

From south side of Highway 26 facing northwest towards AJ Dwyer Scenic Area

Photos taken 4/25/2006 by Laura Dowlan

ODOT Wildwood to Wemme Highway 26 Widening Project
BLM input for Red Tree Voles
3/28/2006

The habitat was evaluated for the feasibility of red tree vole surveys. Due to the lack of visibility into the tree crowns, tree climbing would be required to more fully evaluate whether red tree voles are present. Of the 70 trees that would be removed, approximately 30 trees would need to be climbed. The Area of Potential Impact (API) on BLM lands is small, approximately 1.2 acres in size. The API consists of a small strip of trees between Highway 26 and rural residential neighborhoods. It is located in the Middle Sandy River Watershed on the very west edge of the red tree vole's range in the West Cascades of Oregon. In the 1996 Upper Sandy Watershed Analysis for the Middle and Upper Sandy River, a habitat model for the red tree vole was developed and used to create a map of red tree vole habitat on the Mount Hood National Forest. In that model, primary habitat includes stands classified as large conifer greater than 300 acres which occur at less than 3,000 feet in the Western Hemlock or Pacific Silver Fir vegetation zones. Secondary habitat requirements are the same, except size of habitat is 75 to 300 acres. Marginal habitat includes closed small conifer stands, less than 3,000 ft. in elevation, greater than 75 acres within the same two vegetation zones. The conifer stand on BLM lands in the API does not meet the definitions for primary, secondary or marginal habitat. Due to its small size, location on the fringe of the red tree vole's range adjacent to the Willamette Valley, and the rural residential setting adjacent to a major State highway, this stand is not considered to be high priority red tree vole habitat and overall, impacts are insignificant. In the unlikely circumstance that red tree voles are present in this small stand, it represents a sink area and is not expected to contribute to population viability of this species. Due to the urgency of the purpose and need for highway widening for public safety and the insignificance of impacts to red tree vole, tree climbing to verify the presence of red tree voles was not conducted.