

# Table Rocks Temporary Restrictions Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-OR-M050-2013-0006-EA

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# 1.0 Purpose and Need

## 1.1 Proposed Action

The Bureau of Land Management is proposing the following temporary restrictions on BLM lands in the Table Rocks Management Area (which includes the Table Rocks Area of Critical Environmental Concern):

- No person shall discharge a firearm from or across BLM lands within the Table Rocks Management Area. This includes gas- or air-powered weapons or simulated weapons such as paintball and paintball-like weapons.
- Motorized and nonmotorized mechanized vehicle use is prohibited outside of designated trailhead parking areas.
- Domestic animals, including dogs and horses, are prohibited outside of designated trailhead parking areas.
- The use of metal detectors, as well as digging, scraping, disturbing, or removing natural lands features for any purpose, is not allowed.

The following persons would be exempt from the temporary restrictions: Federal, state, and local officers and employees in the performance of their official duties; members of organized rescue or firefighting forces in the performance of their official duties; and persons with written authorization from the BLM.

Temporary restrictions would be enforced for up to 24 months after posting in the Federal Register, or until permanent supplementary rules are implemented, whichever comes first. Temporary restrictions would also apply to any lands acquired by the BLM within the Table Rocks Management Area while the temporary restrictions are in effect.

## 1.2 Project Area

The proposed Project Area includes lands located in the Table Rocks Management Area, about 10 miles northwest of Medford, Oregon. The proposed project would apply to BLM lands in Township 35 South, Range 2 West, sections 26, 34, 35, and 36 and Township 36 South, Range 2 West, sections 1, 2, 4, and 9 (see Map 1). The Project Area is within the Shady Cove/Rogue River and Gold Hill/Rogue River fifth field watersheds.

## 1.3 Purpose

In order to be considered a reasonable alternative, any action alternative must meet the objectives provided in the 1995 Medford District ROD/RMP (Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan) for projects to be implemented in the Project Area. The action alternative would also implement management recommendations from the Table Rocks Management Area Management Plan (Table Rocks Management Plan) and BLM policy and program direction.

- Maintain, protect, or restore relevant and important values in areas of critical environmental concern (ROD/RMP, p. 56).

- Protect cultural resource values including information and significant sites for public or scientific use by present and future generations (ROD/RMP, p. 71).
- Protect and maintain the integrity of the relic features of Camp White and provide for their use as an interpretive resource (Table Rocks Management Plan, p. 57.)
- Locate, protect, and preserve the integrity of significant cultural resources (Table Rocks Management Plan, p. 57).
- Provide for recreational opportunities that are compatible with the area's designated values and conservation easement terms (Table Rocks Management Plan, p. 58).
- Provide for visitor safety, resource protection, and to address resource use conflicts (BLM Manual 8320—Planning for Recreation and Visitor Services, .02 Objectives.)
- Provide the public with recreation areas and facilities that are free from recognized hazards insofar as practicable (BLM Manual Handbook 1112-1 Safety and Health Management, p. 65).

## 1.3 Need

Temporary restrictions are necessary to protect important cultural, historical, wildlife, and botanical resources on newly acquired and existing public lands within the Table Rocks Management Area until supplementary rules can be implemented.

In 1986, 1,243 acres on Upper and Lower Table Rocks were designated as an ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern). As of 2013, the Medford District BLM has acquired an additional 852 acres of land on Upper and Lower Table Rocks from The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Because the 852 acres are now in public ownership, and not yet under ACEC protection, motorized and nonmotorized mechanized vehicle use; domestic animals such as dogs and horses; firearms and paintball-type guns, and metal detector use are not restricted. Under previous TNC ownership, all of these activities were prohibited and are currently prohibited on the adjacent TNC Preserve land. The values that led to the designation of the Table Rocks ACEC need to be protected from damage from vehicles, firearms, and digging, and the spread of noxious weeds from domestic animals and vehicles.

Lands within the Table Rocks Management Area are a mixture of public and private ownership totaling 4,864 acres. The temporary restrictions on the 2,325 acres of BLM lands would fulfill a need for consistent rules and regulations with the adjoining 2,539 acres of TNC Preserve lands.

Hunting is discouraged because of the ownership patterns and the high recreational use on the hiking trails. Discharging firearms is not currently restricted on any of the public lands in the Table Rocks Management Area; however, it is restricted on the intermixed TNC Preserve lands. Restricting the discharge of firearms is needed to protect visitors and adjacent land owners from stray projectiles that may cause injury or property damage, and to prevent both intentional and inadvertent trespass on TNC and adjacent private lands.

The high numbers of hikers using the trails also leads to user conflicts if motorized or nonmotorized vehicles or domestic animals are using the same trails. Restrictions are needed to help minimize those conflicts.

## **1.4 Issues**

### **1.4.1 Scoping**

The BLM did not solicit scoping comments for this EA. However, these temporary regulations were included as proposed supplementary rules in the development of the Table Rocks Management Plan. The BLM and TNC conducted internal scoping in 2010 to identify threats and develop strategies to maintain or restore the biodiversity and social values of the Table Rocks. Public scoping for the management plan was completed in May 2011 and the BLM and TNC released the final Table Rocks Management Area Management Plan to the public in March 2013. The draft and final management plan documents were mailed to interested parties and posted on the Table Rocks Management Plan Web site. During the development of the management plan, the BLM provided updates to and considered comments from the Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. The BLM also conducted visitor surveys in 2011 using the Southern Oregon Research Center at Southern Oregon University. The BLM discussed hunting issues with representatives from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Oregon Hunters Association. In addition, the BLM met with the Jackson County Commissioners to apprise them of the temporary restrictions proposal.

### **1.4.2 Issues**

Based on public input during the development of the Table Rocks Management Plan and from the interdisciplinary team of resource specialists for that project, the following issues were identified for analysis: public safety, impacts to special status species and cultural resources, and spread of noxious weeds.

## **1.5 Legal Requirements**

The proposed action is in conformance with the objectives, land use allocations, and management direction of the 1995 ROD/RMP and any plan amendments in effect at the time this document is published. The project also conforms with the *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (Northwest Forest Plan).

The project was designed to be consistent with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Medford District by the Oregon and California Railroad and Coos Bay Wagon Road Grant Lands Act (O&C Act), Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Archaeological Resources Protection Act, among others.

## **1.6 Decisions to be Made**

This EA will provide the information needed for the Butte Falls Resource Area Field Manager to select a course of action that will best meet the purpose and need for this project. The Field Manager must decide whether to authorize temporary restrictions for BLM land in the Table Rocks Management Area.

## 2.0 Alternatives

### 2.1 Alternative 1 (No Action)

In Alternative 1, the BLM would not implement temporary restrictions in the Table Rocks Management Area. Current management would continue. The BLM would post the Table Rocks as restricted for dogs, horses, and firearms but could not enforce the restrictions. The Table Rocks would remain closed to off-highway vehicle use. Supplementary rules could be issued in the future.

### 2.2 Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

In Alternative 2, the BLM would implement the temporary restrictions outlined in section 1.1, Proposed Action. The restrictions would be in effect for up to 24 months or until supplementary rules are enacted, whichever comes first. Temporary restrictions would also apply to any lands acquired by the BLM within the Table Rocks Management Area while the temporary restrictions are in effect.

The temporary restrictions would follow the procedures for restrictions outlined in 43 CFR 8364.1(b). Restrictions would be posted in the Medford District BLM Office, on the Medford District Web site, and at the main entry points for the Table Rocks Management Area. The restrictions would also be published in the Federal Register. Persons who fail to comply with the restrictions would be subject to the penalties provided at 43 CFR 8360.0-7, which could include a fine not to exceed \$1,000, imprisonment not to exceed 12 months, or both.

## 3.0 Affected Environment

Located near the rapidly growing Medford urban area, the Table Rocks are one of the most highly visited recreational sites in the Rogue River Valley. About 50,000 people hike the trails to the tops of Upper and Lower Table Rocks every year with use steadily increasing and diversifying. In addition to hiking, the Table Rocks are used for trail running and physical fitness, wildflower study and observation, sightseeing, photography, bird watching, and geocaching. Visitor use has also transitioned from primarily spring use to year-round. Because the hiking trails previously crossed both TNC and BLM lands, the trails have been signed as closed to dogs, horses, biking and hunting to provide consistency with TNC's rules, but with increasing visitation, these activities are being observed more often on the trails. The 852 acres of newly acquired lands that were previously owned by TNC were managed according to TNC regulations. TNC lands are closed to dogs, horses, and other animals; motorized vehicles and bikes (foot traffic only); collecting plants or animals; camping and fires; and hunting (Figure 1). The 1,243 acres of designated ACEC have been closed to off-highway vehicle use since 1985.



Figure 1. TNC regulations

The existing and recently acquired public lands have sensitive cultural, historical, botanical, and wildlife resources. The Table Rocks were used by Native Americans for thousands of years and are cultural keystones for tribes with deep ties to the Table Rocks. The recently acquired parcels contain remnants of Camp White, a World War II training center that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. All

that remains of the 1940s training range on public lands are 14 pillboxes. These concrete structures were designed to simulate Nazi fortifications and were used for infantry drill practice. The Table Rocks Management Area has not yet been thoroughly surveyed for cultural resources, but information gleaned from historical accounts, BLM archaeologists, and tribal resource specialists indicate there is a high probability for cultural sites in the area.



Figure 2. Camp White pillbox

The tops of the Table Rocks contain vernal pool habitat that supports the federally endangered vernal pool fairy shrimp and State threatened dwarf wooly meadowfoam. The federally endangered *Fritillaria gentneri* is found in the chaparral/oak woodland habitat on the Table Rocks. The open grasslands on the lower slopes have a high density of Special Status plants in the seasonally wet drainages. Game species in the management area include turkey, deer, and elk. The open grasslands are home to a large herd of elk that is often visible to local residents and travelers on Antioch Road.

Six priority noxious weed species have been reported on the Table Rocks. Those species include yellow starthistle, rush skeletonweed, Himalayan blackberry, medusahead rye grass, garlic mustard, and puncturevine.

## 4.0 Environmental Consequences

### 4.1 Effects of Alternative 1 (No Action)

Under Alternative 1, the temporary restrictions would not be enacted. The BLM would continue to post the trailheads as closed to dogs, horses, and hunting; however, these restrictions would not be enforceable. Conflicts and safety concerns from the discharge of firearms, motorized and nonmotorized vehicles, and domestic animals would continue and could increase as visitor numbers increase. Cultural and historical resources would be endangered from digging, shooting, and metal detector use. Special status plants and animals would be impacted by domestic animals carrying noxious weed seeds into the area and trampling sensitive plants and animals and their habitat. Although temporary restrictions would not be implemented at this time, the BLM could introduce supplementary rules in the future. Delaying restrictions until supplementary rules are enacted would allow more time for the unenforceable activities to be perceived as acceptable and customary, which could result in additional enforcement difficulties in the future.

### 4.2 Effects of Alternative 2 (Proposed Action)

#### 4.2.1 Direct and Indirect Effects

The Table Rocks experience high recreational use, and contain historically significant pillboxes, threatened and endangered plants and wildlife, other Special Status plants and animals, and a high probability of Native American cultural resources. Additionally, a seasonal elk herd that is highly visible from a heavily travelled county road, places the BLM lands at risk for damage from gunfire and paintball activities, motorized and nonmotorized mechanized vehicle use, digging and the use of metal detectors, and impacts from domestic animals such as dogs and horses. In Alternative 2, the BLM would implement temporary restrictions on

these uses on public lands within the management area for 2 years or until supplementary rules are put into effect.

Restricting the discharge of firearms would protect human safety and property and prevent potential accidents. The high numbers of visitors, year-round use, proximity to adjacent private landowners, and mixed ownership increases the risk of injury to visitors and adjacent property owners and damage to private property from firearm use in the Table Rocks Management Area. Restricting the discharge of firearms would curtail the occurrence of hunters trespassing across private lands to reach BLM land. The Camp White pillboxes located on the newly acquired lands would be protected from damage that could be incurred from bullets or paint balls.

Restricting the use of firearms would temporarily curtail the use of the BLM lands in the management area for hunting. Hunters that currently use the Table Rocks Management Area would be displaced to other areas during the temporary restrictions. Public lands, including the nearby Denman Wildlife Refuge, would remain available for hunting.

A restriction on motorized vehicles would continue the restriction that has been in place since 1985 on the BLM lands currently designated as ACEC. It would add the motorized vehicle restriction to the newly acquired lands; however, motorized vehicles were banned from these lands by the previous owner. This restriction would allow the BLM and Jackson County deputies to enforce the motor vehicle restriction consistently on all lands within the management area.

Nonmotorized vehicles such as mountain bikes would not be allowed outside the designated parking areas. This would protect hikers and other trail users that may encounter mountain bikes on steep sections of trail or areas where line-of-sight is limited, especially when bikes are traveling downhill. A temporary ban on mountain bikes would help preserve wildlife viewing opportunities and nature study for hikers.

Restricting domestic animals, especially dogs and horses, to designated parking areas would protect domestic animals and wildlife from disease and each other, limit the spread of noxious weeds, preserve aesthetics from pet waste left behind, and protect fragile plants and plant and wildlife habitat. This restriction would also protect visitors from aggressive or overly friendly dogs, especially when encountered on the narrow, highly used trails. The Table Rocks have been posted as closed to dogs and horses since the 1990s. The newly acquired lands previously owned by the TNC banned dogs, horses, and other animals and this prohibition would continue that policy. This rule would displace only the visitors to BLM lands that currently choose to ignore the signs posted at the trailheads. Other trails that are open to domestic animals are available in the area.

In Alternative 2, the use of metal detectors would be temporarily restricted, as would digging, scraping, disturbing, or removing natural land features. Restricting the use of metal detectors would protect historical and archaeological sites in the Table Rocks Management Area from being disturbed or destroyed. This restriction would also protect the special status plant and animal species and their habitat and the unique geological values found in the Table Rocks Management Area.

Establishing the list of temporary restrictions would allow the BLM to implement recommendations in the Table Rocks Management Plan designed to provide recreation opportunities in the management area that

are compatible with the area's designated values. The restrictions would achieve this objective by limiting the activities, as listed in the temporary restrictions, that are not compatible with those values.

#### **4.2.2 Cumulative Effects**

Since the 1990s, the Table Rock trails have been posted as closed to dogs, horses, bikes, and firearms. The BLM land in the Table Rocks ACEC and the land previously under TNC ownership have been closed to motorized use. Visitors may view these restrictions as a continuation of current management. Restrictions in the Table Rocks Management Area would decrease the total amount of public land in the area that is available for hunting, metal detecting, and paintball activities. However, these activities could still occur and would increase on other public lands where they are allowed.

Although the Table Rocks trails would be off limits for mountain bikes, trails are available for mountain biking in and near the Rogue River Valley. The BLM is currently evaluating construction of a mountain bike and hiking trail system near the city of Rogue River. In addition, since these restrictions would be temporary and would be in effect for no more than two years, impacts would be short-term and would not affect future recreational opportunities.

### **5.0 Consultation and Coordination**

The TNC and the three federally recognized tribes with associations to the Table Rocks—Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians—have been actively involved in the management of the Table Rocks. The BLM sought TNC and tribal input on the development of the Table Rocks Management Plan, which included recommendations for allowable uses and constraints. The US Fish and Wildlife Service also contributed to the Management Plan development. The BLM discussed hunting issues with representatives from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Oregon Hunters Association. The BLM presented the proposed temporary restrictions to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, which generated newspaper and television coverage. The BLM did not receive any comments or concerns from the public regarding the restrictions as a result of the media coverage.

## EA Availability and Comment Procedures

This EA is posted on the Medford District BLM Web site at <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/plans/index.php>. This document is available for public review and comment for a period of 15 days. The 15-day comment period will begin when the notice of the EA availability is published in the *Medford Mail Tribune*. The most useful comments are those that clearly communicate your issues or concerns or provide new information that would affect the analysis or show evidence of flawed or incomplete analysis.

**Comments regarding the Table Rocks Temporary Restrictions project must be received by 4:30 p.m. on the closing day of the comment period.**

At the end of the comment period, the BLM will issue a decision regarding this project, taking into consideration all pertinent site-specific issues or concerns received.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations or businesses and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

If you have questions or comments concerning this project, please contact Trish Lindaman at 541-618-2266. Comments may also be mailed or delivered to the Bureau of Land Management, Attention: Trish Lindaman, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504. E-mail comments may be sent to [BLM\\_OR\\_MD\\_Mail@blm.gov](mailto:BLM_OR_MD_Mail@blm.gov) (Attention: Trish Lindaman).

# List of Preparers

Trish Lindaman, Outdoor Recreation Planner

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## References

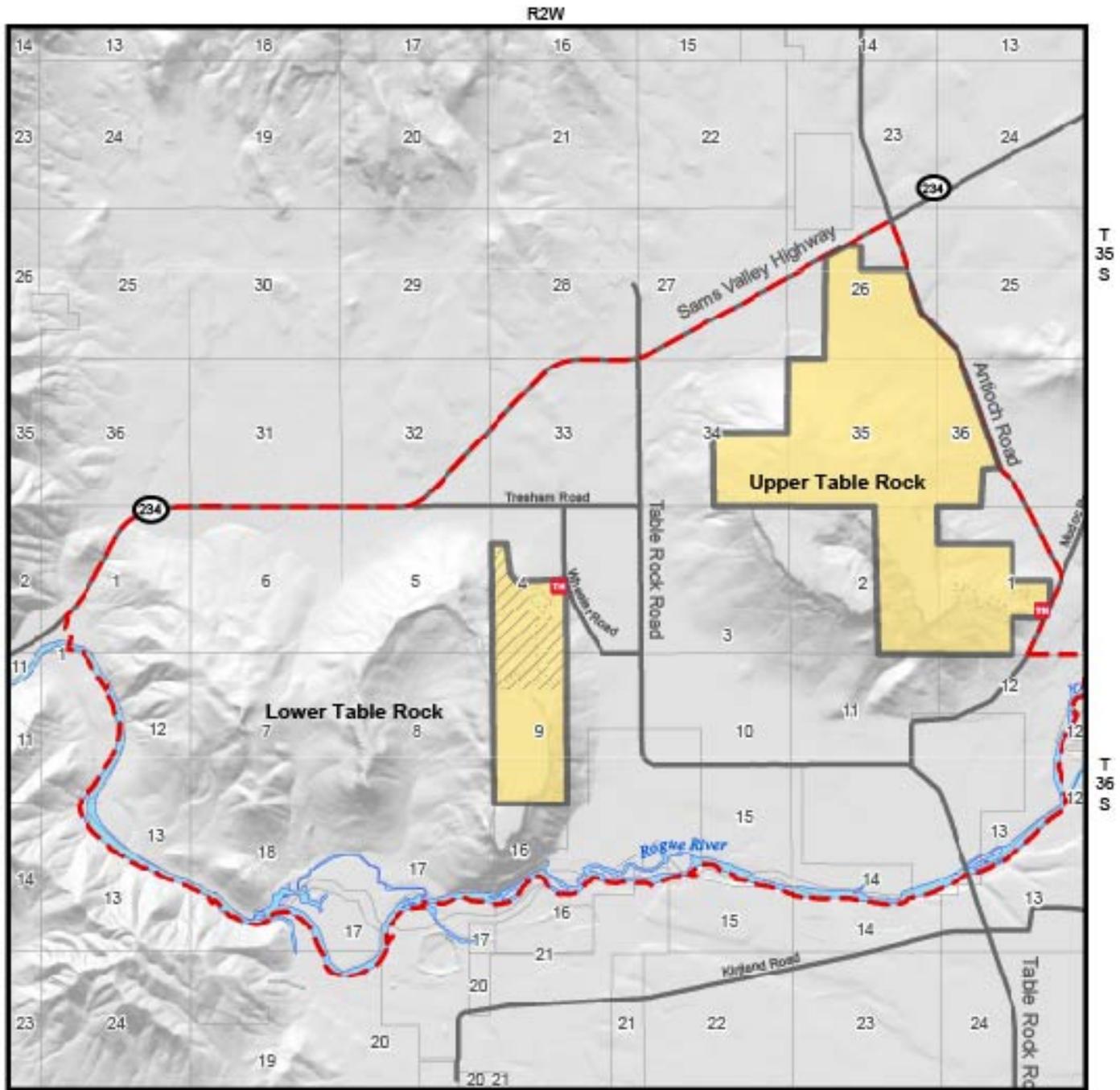
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Bureau of Land Management. 2013. Table Rocks Management Area Management Plan. Medford District, Butte Falls Resource Area, Medford, OR.

# Map 1. BLM Lands in the Table Rocks Management Area Subject to Temporary Restrictions



-  BLM Lands to be Restricted
-  Parcel to be Donated to BLM
-  Trailhead
-  Table Rocks Management Area

