

SCOPING INFORMATION: RECREATION AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING IN THE THIRTYMILE ACQUISITION AREA

Note: The maps and tables referenced in this document are available on the project's website: <https://go.usa.gov/xsbsG> (and can also be accessed through the individual links in this document)

What lands are included in the Planning Area?

The Thirtymile Planning Area is located approximately ten miles southwest of Condon, Oregon on the east side of the John Day River (See [Map 1](#), attached). It includes approximately 11 miles of Thirtymile Creek, six miles of John Day River frontage as well as surrounding upland areas. The planning area includes almost 20,000 total acres of public land, including the 11,153 acres of land that the BLM acquired in 2018 and 2019 with Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) (See [Map 2](#)). The John Day Basin Resource Management Plan (JDBRMP) provides overall management direction for public lands in the planning area (the JDBRMP can be accessed online at this link: <http://go.usa.gov/xwSY2>).

What resources or resource uses are present in and adjacent to the Planning Area?

The Planning Area includes a wide variety of natural and cultural resources, as well as existing resource uses including:

- Designated critical habitat for the Mid-Columbia River summer steelhead in Thirtymile Creek and the John Day River ([See Map 3](#)),
- Approximately 200 acres of acquired lands are within the Lower John Day River Wild and Scenic River Corridor ([See Map 3](#)),
- Armstrong Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which was designated to protect visual quality in the John Day River and Thirtymile canyons ([See Map 3](#)),
- The southwest corner of the Planning Area includes a portion of the North Pole Ridge Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and the Thirtymile WSA is located just to the north ([See Map 3](#)),
- Between Thirtymile Creek and the Thirtymile WSA are two areas that were designated in the JDBRMP as areas to be managed to protect wilderness characteristics ([See Map 3](#)),
- A wilderness characteristics inventory of the acquired parcels found that one unit, that is just over 7,000 acres, is of sufficient size (5,000 acres or more) and has wilderness characteristics (See [Map 4](#)). The inventory report is available online at: <https://go.usa.gov/xMTZR>,
- The river frontage and western portion of Thirtymile canyon are within the Lower John Day Special Recreation Management Area ([See Map 3](#)),
- The Planning Area contains important pre-historic and historic cultural resources, including a historic cultural landscape with several historic structures found to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places,
- The area is occupied bighorn sheep habitat and is winter range for both deer and elk and provides habitat for several other species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Notable species include bald and golden eagles, peregrine falcons and other upland game birds,
- The area is valued for its access to the river for shorter floats for bighorn sheep hunting, and upland areas for big game and upland bird hunting. Access to these areas has created valued hunting grounds with large areas of contiguous public land and hike in hunting opportunities,
- The planning area includes an access point to the John Day Wild and Scenic River for boaters. While under private ownership and management, the access point was used as a boat launch and takeout for over 30 years. Boaters paid a fee to the private landowners. Following the acquisition, the boat ramp is now available for public use ([See Map 3](#)),

- The Gas Transmission Northwest pipeline, a major natural gas pipeline that runs from Canada to California, passes through the Planning Area, crossing under the John Day River just north of Thirtymile Creek and again approximately one mile upriver at Pine Creek. The gas line corridor is designated as one of the existing utility corridors in the John Day Basin RMP (See [Map 5](#)),
- The acquired lands are part of the Rattray livestock grazing allotment and the planning area also includes portions of the Ellsworth, Buck Hollow, Sid Seale and Lear allotments (See [Map 5](#)).

Why is recreation and travel management planning needed here at this time?

The land was purchased, in part, by LWCF funds earmarked for sportsmen’s access. The acquired lands provide public access to the Thirtymile boat launch, which had been previously privately controlled. Access, travel management and the associated recreation opportunities in the area are therefore important management issues for both the public and BLM. The JDBRMP provides overall management direction for the newly acquired lands. But, since the lands were not in BLM management when the JDBRMP was approved in 2015, interim route designations were not done for the roads on the acquired parcels. As the previous question highlights, the Thirtymile area includes a complex mix of many important natural resources and resource uses. There is a need to provide more site-specific management direction for recreation and travel management in order to provide access to the public for recreation and other uses while also protecting these sensitive natural and cultural resources.

What is a Comprehensive Travel and Transportation Management Plan?

A comprehensive travel and transportation management plan is an analysis that considers the access needs of all public land users. Access needs are evaluated in conjunction with the BLM’s legal mandate to protect natural and cultural resources on public lands. A range of alternative transportation networks will be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment (EA), with each individual route (See [Map 6](#)) classified by the following factors:

- Type of Asset: road, primitive road, trail, temporary route, transportation linear disturbance
- Allowable Mode of Travel: motorized, non-motorized, e-bikes, non-mechanized
- Allowable Users: public, administrative use or authorized/permitted users only
- Restrictions or Limitations: seasonal, type of vehicle, etc.
- Every route will receive one of the following Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) designations:
 - OHV Open: Route is open for motorized use by the public.
 - OHV Limited: Travel on this route is limited to the public in some form (such as seasonal restriction, vehicle width restriction, etc.).
 - OHV Closed: Route is closed to public motorized use.
- OHV designations do not apply to motorized vehicles whose use is expressly authorized by the BLM (i.e., grazing permittees, right-of-way and easement holders); vehicles in official use; or vehicles being used for emergency purposes (fire, military or law enforcement). Routes with authorized users are shown on [Map 7](#).
- For all alternatives, equestrian use and foot travel are allowed throughout the area, including cross-country travel off designated routes. Bikes, e-bikes or motorized vehicles are not allowed off designated routes under any alternative (consistent with the JDBRMP OHV area designations of closed and limited).

The BLM has developed four preliminary alternatives for the area, briefly defined as:

- Alternative 1 – the no action alternative; how the routes are currently being managed. This alternative is required and provides a baseline for analysis of effects. Basic road maintenance

actions such as road grading and cleaning drainage dips and minor additions of surface rock in soft areas would continue.

- Alternative 2 - designed to provide maximum resource conservation to the natural and cultural resources in the area while still providing reasonable access. Road maintenance would be limited to actions to retain roadways for authorized users (potentially at their expense) and prevent resource damage from road drainage issues.
- Alternative 3 – a blend of Alternatives 2 & 4 and is designed to balance the need for access with protection of the natural and cultural resources in the area. Road maintenance would include basic grading and maintenance of drainage features, addition of rock surfacing in more areas, as well as some widening and installation of pullouts on the main road down Armstrong Canyon to the boat launch.
- Alternative 4 - designed to provide resource use to the area while providing reasonable protection to important natural and cultural resources. Road maintenance would include widening, rock surfacing and drainage improvements to allow the main road down Armstrong Canyon to the boat launch to be accessible year-round.

[Table 1](#) provides basic information about each linear feature (route) and the linear feature segments are displayed on [Map 6](#). [Table 2](#) and Maps [8](#), [9](#), [10](#) and [11](#) show the OHV designations by alternative. [Table 3](#) lists the type of asset and the mode of transport authorized for the public, as well as definitions of each of these classifications; this info is also displayed on Maps [12](#), [13](#), [14](#) and [15](#) by alternative.

Some alternatives include “Restoration” of routes. What does that mean?

In some of the alternatives routes are classified as “Transportation Linear Disturbances”; which are routes without an identified purpose, redundant routes, or routes that might be causing impacts to natural or cultural resources. These linear disturbances would not be considered part of the transportation system and would be restored using methods ranging from passive to active restoration. Passive restoration (where routes are allowed to naturally re-vegetate over time) would be used where linear features have already started to become overgrown and where more active restoration would cause more disturbance. More active restoration methods would include decommissioning (de-compacting compacted layers, restoring vegetation, adding organic matter and restoring hydrologic function) or obliterating (re-sloping hillslopes to eliminate the appearance of a human caused feature, restoring vegetation, adding organic matter, eliminating compaction and restoring hillslope processes). Please provide input on specific routes and the type of restoration method or why you think a specific route should or should not be restored. Alternative 1, the no action alternative, will analyze maintaining all existing routes.

How are e-bikes being considered and where can e-bikes be used?

E-bikes are bicycles with fully operable pedals and a small electric motor that does not exceed 750 watts (one horsepower). The motor assists in the operation of the bicycle and reduces the rider’s physical exertion demands. E-bikes are allowed on all roads and trails open to motorized vehicles. E-bikes are also allowed on trails limited to bicycles and non-motorized travel only if a BLM Manager has issued a written decision authorizing e-bike use in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. For purposes of considering the preliminary alternatives for this analysis, the BLM’s intention is that e-bikes be treated the same as non-motorized bicycles under Alternatives 3 and 4. In Alternatives 1 and 2, e-bikes would be allowed on motorized routes only. Please provide input on specific routes and any

concerns you might have with e-bike use. For more information on the use of e-bikes on public lands see the following website: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/recreation/e-bikes>

What aspects of recreation management are being considered in the plan?

Since the acquired lands are located adjacent to existing parcels within the Lower John Day Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), the area will be managed per direction for the SRMA. An SRMA is an area where BLM will focus and invest time, management, funding and facilities. The desired condition for the Lower John Day SRMA, as outlined in the JDBRMP, is for a more natural landscape, with minimal facility development, primarily for resource protection. The BLM is considering the following types of actions (See [Map 16](#) for a location overview):

- Sanitation needs; including whether to install one or more vault toilets,
- Should the Thirtymile boat launch continue operation and if so, what improvements might be needed for the boat launch itself and adjacent areas including, parking, loading area and adjacent dispersed camping opportunities (See [Maps 17](#) and [18](#)),
- Parking needs at other non-motorized access points (See [Maps 19](#) and [20](#)), and
- Restoration of native vegetation in the former agriculture field where recreation improvements are proposed including treatment of invasive weeds through prescribed burning and spraying herbicide. Native vegetation, including native grasses, shrubs and hardwood species such as willows and cottonwood, would then be seeded or planted to create a mosaic of native vegetation throughout the area. This would provide shade and visual screening along the river, as well as a more desirable dispersed camping setting. Annual treatment of excess fuels through mowing or weed-eating would be used to lower fire risk in high use areas (See [Map 18](#)).

See the attached maps ([Map 16](#), [17](#), [18](#), [19](#) and [20](#)) for the location of these proposed improvements. Following public input from scoping, the BLM will develop a range of recreation actions within the travel management range of alternatives for analysis.

What actions are not being considered in this plan?

- Riparian restoration: The BLM is currently working with interagency partners to develop a plan to restore steelhead spawning and rearing habitat in the lower ten miles of Thirtymile Creek. The BLM is considering a phased restoration approach using a variety of restoration tools including the addition of large woody debris and boulders; installing vertical posts to simulate beaver dams; planting riparian vegetation; and in extreme cases, leveling out the valley floor to allow streamflow to recreate channels and floodplains. The BLM will analyze these riparian restoration options in a separate EA (see project site: <http://go.usa.gov/x6Rny>).
- Authorization of livestock grazing on acquired lands: The BLM needs to conduct surveys of available forage before analyzing grazing options; especially following wildfires that burned much of the acquired parcels in 2018. Other than potentially identifying areas where grazing would not be conducive to recreation and identifying unneeded grazing infrastructure that could be removed, grazing management will be considered in a separate analysis.
- Boating permit allocation: The John Day RMP carried direction forward from the John Day River Wild and Scenic River Plan and the John Day River Study EA concerning boater permit allocation. Trip permits are allocated through a first-come, first-serve common pool reservation system to all users in the same manner. A seasonal limited entry permit system was reinstated in 2020 through Recreation.gov; although the John Day River was closed for much of the 2020 season due to COVID restrictions. In response to feedback about the limited entry permit system, the BLM is making administrative level adjustments for 2022 including rolling release and the addition of a long-distance permit category. Since the decision regarding the allocation system

was set at the RMP or land use planning level, it will not be considered for this implementation level decision at this time. See [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) for more information on boating permits.

How do I provide input for the travel management and recreation plan and what kind of input would be the most helpful to BLM?

- Written comments can be submitted through the ePlanning application site at: <https://go.usa.gov/xsbsG>
- Comments can be e-mailed to: BLM_OR_PR_Thirtymile@blm.gov
- Comments can be mailed to the BLM Prineville District Office; Attn: Thirtymile Project; 3050 NE Third Street; Prineville, OR 97754

BLM uses the scoping period to get input from the public and other agencies on the issues, impacts and potential alternatives that will be addressed in the analysis. For purposes of BLM National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, an “issue” is a point of disagreement, debate or dispute with a proposed action based on some anticipated environmental effect. The analysis of environmental effects will focus on identified issues in order to focus on the information necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives. Please provide input on issues you have related to the effects of the proposed preliminary alternatives. BLM also welcomes input on the range of preliminary alternatives that have been presented and invites the public to suggest other alternative ways to meet the purpose and need for action. Input is most helpful if it is specific and provides a reasoned rationale or shows how a proposed action may lead to an environmental effect that you are concerned about. General position statements or statements in favor or against an action without providing rationale or reasoning are less helpful in refining issues and alternatives. Comments are most helpful if they:

- Are specific to identified routes or actions.
- Provide a clear rationale or cause and effect relationship with proposed actions, i.e. “I am concerned about route BLM99 because I think motorized use of this route will affect the natural setting and visual resources along the John Day Wild and Scenic River.”
- Provide input on issues, or areas of concern, that you think should be analyzed in order to provide a thorough comparison of the effects of the alternatives, i.e. “I am concerned that limiting the area to non-motorized access, as in Alternative 2, will decrease the number of visitors and impact the local economy. I think this issue should be analyzed in the EA.”
- Provide additional information or correct information regarding the current route inventory or information regarding natural and cultural resources in the area.
- Provide suggestions on the range of alternatives or suggest other alternative ways to meet the purpose and need for action.
- Provide specifics on the type of recreation developments desired to meet your desired recreation access needs, while maintaining the backcountry (generally natural appearing) recreation setting designated for the area by the John Day Basin RMP. For example, where do you think sanitation facilities are needed and what type of facilities do you think are appropriate at the boat launch? Do you think dispersed camping should be confined to a limited area to prevent the spread of resource impacts? If so, where should those areas be located?