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FINAL Environmental Assessment for Wasson and Franklin Creeks Comprehensive River Management Plan



Wasson Creek



Franklin Creek



Forest Service
Siuslaw National Forest
Central Coast Ranger District



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Introduction

The U.S. Forest Service’s (USFS) Siuslaw National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Coos Bay District are proposing to adopt a comprehensive river management plan for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers. The primary goal of this plan is to provide management direction for protecting and enhancing the river values of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek. The plan includes resource protection related to the wild and scenic rivers’ free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values, with particular emphasis on development of lands and facilities, visitor capacities, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purposes of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (the Act). The Coos Bay District and Siuslaw National Forest are pursuing an interagency strategy for the management of these wild and scenic river corridors. We prepared this environmental assessment to analyze and disclose the effects of adopting the proposed management plan. By preparing this environmental assessment, we are fulfilling agency policy and direction to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations.

Changes from Draft to Final Environmental Assessment

Following public comment received on the draft environmental assessment, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management made minor changes to the final environmental assessment. Language has been added to the environmental assessment on p. 5 to clarify that no ground disturbing management actions are being proposed in this project, only inventory and monitoring activities. Additional information on the boundary determination process has also been provided. This document includes the agencies’ response to comments received on the draft environmental assessment and a map of land use allocations requested by the public.

Background

In 2019, Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek were designated as additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (Dingell Act) (Public Law 116-9). Section 3(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires the Federal agencies charged with the administration of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to prepare a comprehensive river management plan for each designated river segment to provide for the protection of the segment’s river values.

Table 1. Description of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek designated river segments

Designated Segment	Length (mi.)	Classification	Administering Agency	Upstream Terminus	Downstream Terminus
Wasson	4.2	Wild	Bureau of Land Management	Headwaters in T21S, R9W, Section 17	BLM-USFS boundary in T21S, R10W, Section 14
Wasson	5.9	Wild	U.S. Forest Service	BLM-USFS boundary in T21S, R10W, Section 14	Private land boundary in T21S, R10W, Section 22
Franklin	4.5	Wild	U.S. Forest Service	Headwaters in T22S, R10W, Section 2	Private land boundary in T22S, R10W, Section 8

Rivers designated by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act are classified as wild, recreational and scenic (section 2(b)). The Dingell Act classified the designated segments as wild (table 1). As described in section 2(b) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, a wild river is “a river or segment of a river that is free of impoundments and inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America.”

Based upon the evaluation of corridor conditions, existing management direction, and need for action, the comprehensive river management plan would:

- address current conditions and other management practices, as required by law;
- provide direction on how to protect and enhance outstandingly remarkable values;
- provide direction to ensure free-flowing conditions and water quality are maintained;
- determine types and amounts of uses (visitor capacity) that each river can support while protecting river values;
- inform future management actions within the designated river corridors; and
- develop a monitoring strategy to maintain desired conditions.

This action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to protect and enhance the water quality, free flow characteristics, and outstandingly remarkable values of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek.

Location of the Proposed Project Area

Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek are located in the central Oregon Coast Range, approximately 20 miles east of Reedsport and 70 miles southwest of Eugene (figure 1). Wasson Creek Wild and Scenic River is 10.1 miles long, with the Bureau of Land Management managing the eastern segment and the Forest Service managing the western segment. Downstream of the wild and scenic river boundary, Wasson Creek flows north for 6.5 miles before emptying into the Smith River. Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River is 4.5 miles long and is managed entirely by the Forest Service. Downstream of the wild and scenic river boundary, Franklin Creek flows another 0.5 miles southwest before emptying into the Umpqua River.

The two wild and scenic rivers are in an isolated, undeveloped, and rugged portion of the Coast Range (figure 2). The surrounding terrain is characterized by dense vegetation and steep slopes. The wild and scenic rivers range in elevation from 100 feet to 1,200 feet above sea level, with nearby slopes rising to 1,650 feet. Both creeks’ drainages are dominated by late-successional temperate rainforest communities that have not been logged or significantly disturbed by other human activities. These upland and riparian areas provide habitat for a wide range of mammals, birds, amphibians, resident fish, and anadromous fish. There are few roads near the wild and scenic river corridors, and there are no system trails or developed facilities in the immediate area. Public use of Wasson and Franklin Creeks is low and mainly consists of backcountry recreation. All of Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River and most of Wasson Creek Wild and Scenic River overlap with the Devil’s Staircase Wilderness, which was also designated in the Dingell Act.

Wasson and Franklin Creeks Comprehensive River Management Plan
Final Environmental Assessment

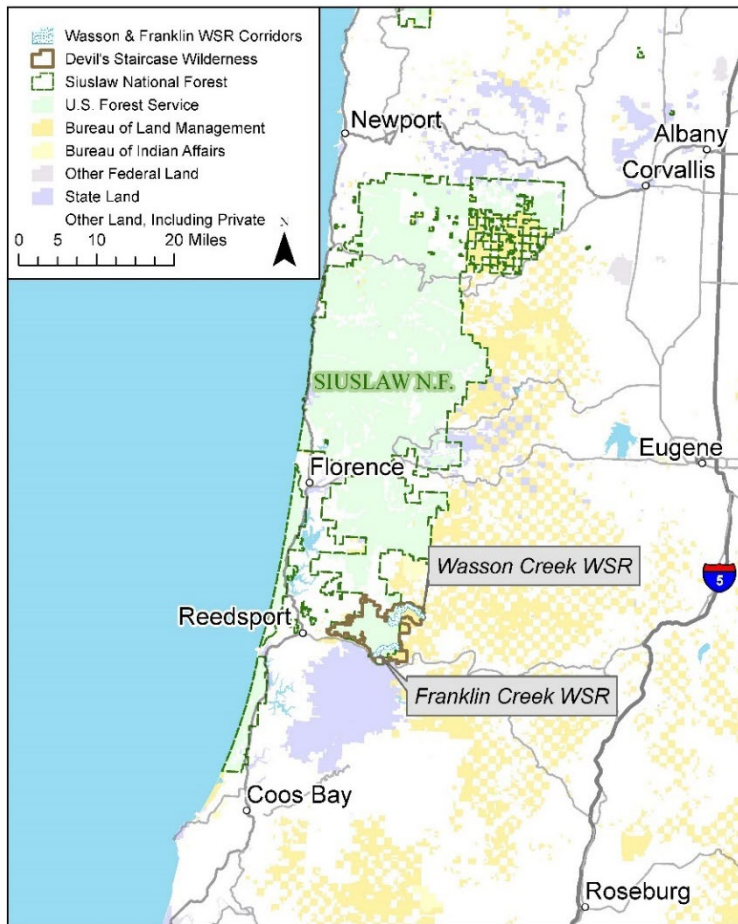


Figure 1. Wasson and Franklin Creeks wild and scenic vicinity map

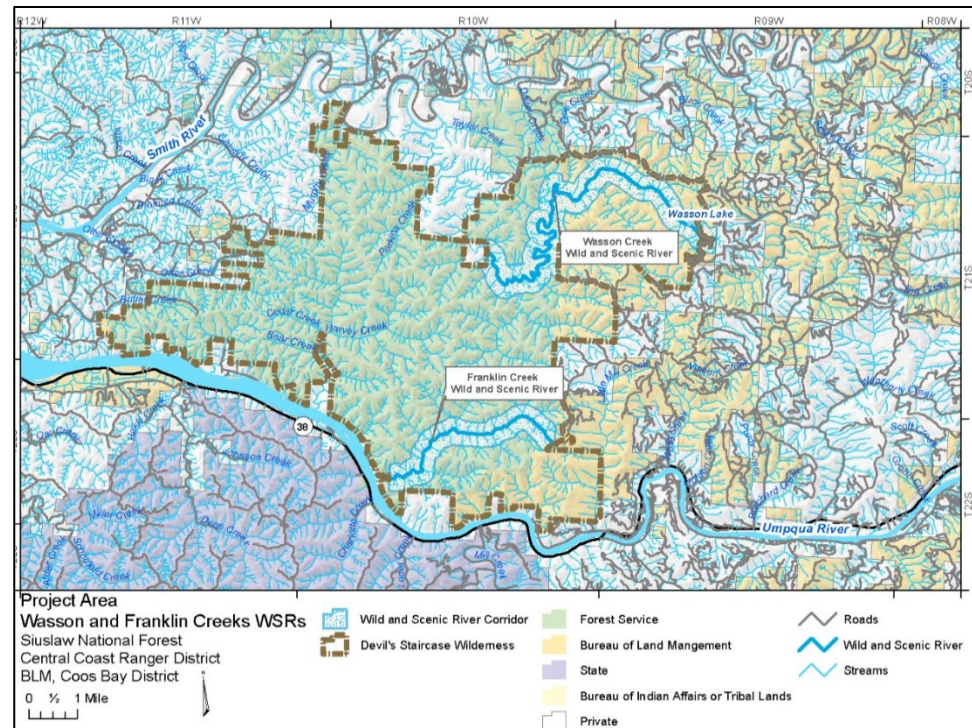


Figure 2. Wasson and Franklin Creeks project area

Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek are located within the ancestral territory of the Quuiich (Lower Umpqua) People, and the upper portion of Wasson Creek is also part of the territory claimed by the Yoncalla Kalapuya People. The Lower Umpqua People are members of the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians. The Yoncalla Kalapuya People are members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

Management Direction

Relevant management direction applicable to the proposal is located in the Wasson and Franklin Creeks Comprehensive River Management Plan, which can be found on the [project web page](#).

Other Supporting Documentation

Documentation and analysis that supports and expands on the information contained in this environmental assessment and comprehensive river management plan includes:

- [The River Values Report for Wasson Creek and Franklin Wild and Scenic Rivers \(March 2021, updated November 2021\)](#)
- [The Capacity Report for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers \(November 2021\)](#).

These documents are located on the [project web page](#) and in the project record.

Purpose and Need for the Comprehensive River Management Plan and Final Boundary Determinations

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act mandates that agencies with jurisdiction over newly designated rivers complete comprehensive river management plans to provide for the protection and enhancement of the designated segments' river values (16 U.S.C. 1274(d)). The purpose of this proposal is to develop a comprehensive river management plan to protect and enhance the values for which Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers were designated (free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values) and to identify agency management actions needed to protect these values on federally managed lands within the wild and scenic river corridors. Another purpose of this proposal is to establish the final river corridor boundaries to facilitate the protection and enhancement of the outstandingly remarkable values within the limits set in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Decision to be Made

This environmental assessment analyzes the effects of adopting a comprehensive river management plan. The proposed management plan does not propose ground disturbing management activities. The plan recommends inventory activities to inform the baseline condition. It also recommends monitoring that should occur to determine what potential impacts are occurring over time. The plan identifies potential management actions that could be considered to maintain and enhance the values for which these water bodies were designated. If managers determine that action is needed to maintain or enhance these values, additional environmental review may be required at that time.

The [Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan](#) (1990) does not currently include a management area for designated wild and scenic rivers. Therefore, it would be necessary to create a new management area for this project with the accompanying management direction. Creation of a new management area and associated forest plan components requires a programmatic forest plan amendment. No amendments to the [Bureau of Land Management Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan](#) (2016) are necessary, as this Resource Management Plan addresses wild and scenic rivers.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

This environmental assessment analyzes two alternatives: a no-action alternative and the proposed action as described below.

Alternative 1 - No Action

The no-action alternative provides a baseline for estimating the effects of other alternatives. Under this alternative no changes would be made to the interim corridor boundaries, which would be submitted to Congress as the final detailed corridor boundaries. The corridor boundaries would be located approximately 0.25 miles from the banks of each side of each river. This interim corridor width is defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Standards and guidelines from the existing Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan direction for undeveloped areas (Management Area 11) would continue to apply to Franklin Creek and the Forest Service portion of Wasson Creek without any changes. The Bureau of Land Management portion of Wasson Creek would continue to be managed under guidance provided in the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan without additional objectives and direction. Both river corridors would remain as congressionally withdrawn and the agencies' respective wilderness management direction would continue to apply where the river corridors overlap with the wilderness designation. Visitor capacity analysis is still required and was conducted (Comprehensive River Management Plan, located on the [project web page](#)). Monitoring would consist of data already being collected for other purposes. No management actions would be implemented to protect or enhance outstandingly remarkable values. There would be no need for a programmatic amendment to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan.

Alternative 2 - The Proposed Action

The proposed action is to adopt the Wasson and Franklin Creeks Comprehensive River Management Plan and final boundaries for each river corridor based on the requirements in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Relevant content contained in the comprehensive river management plan would include:

- a description of the existing resource conditions including a detailed description of the river values;
- desired conditions for protecting river values;
- a determination of visitor use capacities;
- descriptions of consistent and inconsistent uses within the corridor;
- instream flow and water quality requirements;
- management actions to protect and enhance river values;
- identification of regulatory authorities of other governmental agencies that assist in protecting river values; and
- a monitoring strategy to maintain desired conditions.

The proposed action analyzed in this environmental assessment includes only those actions that change existing management practices. This includes establishing the outstandingly remarkable values, establishing visitor capacities, identifying management actions to protect and enhance river values, adopting a monitoring strategy, and establishing final boundaries. This alternative also proposes to add a new management area (Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers) to the Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. A programmatic amendment¹ to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan would be necessary to add a new management area that would apply to the Forest Service managed portion of Wasson Creek and to Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River corridors, as defined by the final adopted river boundaries.

Proposed Outstandingly Remarkable Values

Wild and Scenic Rivers designated by the Act possess outstandingly remarkable values that may include one or more of the following: “scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values” (section 1(b)). To be assessed as outstandingly remarkable, a river-related value must be a unique, rare, or exemplary feature that is significant at a comparative regional or national scale. Standard dictionary definitions of the words “unique” and “rare” indicate that such a value would be one that is a conspicuous example from among a number of similar values that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary. A river values assessment was prepared by an interdisciplinary team to evaluate the outstandingly remarkable values and assess water quality and free-flow condition. Wasson Creek was found to possess outstandingly remarkable values for scenery, primitive recreation, fisheries, beaver habitat, and ecological systems; Franklin Creek was found to have outstandingly remarkable values for scenery, fisheries, beaver habitat, and ecological systems. The proposed outstandingly remarkable values for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek are summarized below. For a complete description of free flow, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values, please refer to the comprehensive river management plan ([project web page](#)) and the [River Values Report for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers \(March 2021\)](#) located on the [project web page](#) and in the project record.

River Values – Wasson Creek

Free flow: Wasson Creek is free-flowing along its entire length and does not contain any impoundments, diversions, or riprap that interfere with free flow. Annual stream flow is primarily driven by rainfall, with peak flows occurring in the winter and low flows occurring in the summer. Wasson Lake is naturally occurring; the present-day lake outlet was formed by a landslide in the early nineteenth century.

Water quality: The 2016 reassessment of the Forest Service’s Watershed Condition Framework assigned Wasson Creek a water quality indicator score of “Good.” Very few roads are present in the Wasson Creek drainage, and the land management agencies have identified a need to formally evaluate these roads for their potential to deliver surface flow and sediment to the creek. Because it is located in an undisturbed and fairly pristine drainage, Wasson Creek can act as a reference for naturally occurring water quality conditions in the region of comparison.

Scenery outstandingly remarkable value: The hydrology and geology of the creek combine with the old growth forest and topography to create an exemplary scenic setting. This determination applies to the entire length of the wild and scenic river corridor. Devil’s Staircase Waterfall, the Dark Grove, and

¹ A programmatic amendment changes the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan for the duration of the Plan whereas a site-specific amendment arises from the need to take a specific action to meet a forest plan goal or a desired condition and only applies to that project or activity.

Wasson Lake are notable scenic locations within the Wasson Creek corridor; they are also within the Devil's Staircase Wilderness.

Recreation outstandingly remarkable value: Wasson Creek provides an exemplary opportunity for solitude and primitive recreation in a rugged, remote, and wild setting. Devil's Staircase Waterfall is a regionally recognized backcountry destination and is an exemplary case of a creek-based attraction in a wilderness setting.

Fish populations and habitat outstandingly remarkable value: Wasson Creek supports ten contiguous miles of high-quality aquatic habitat, with cold water inputs for critical habitat areas downstream of the wild and scenic river segment. Several sensitive anadromous species (Pacific lamprey and winter steelhead) are present in the lower portion of the segment, and an isolated population of resident coastal cutthroat trout (Oregon Coast population) is present above Devil's Staircase Waterfall.

Beaver habitat outstandingly remarkable value: Wasson Creek provides excellent habitat for beaver, which is a regionally significant species due to its role in the freshwater ecosystems of the Oregon Coast Range. High-quality beaver habitat is rare within the region of comparison due to timber harvest and development activities. Evidence of beaver activity has been documented throughout the length of the wild and scenic river corridor.

Ecological systems outstandingly remarkable value: Wasson Creek showcases a nearly pristine example of the temperate rainforest ecosystems that are present in the central Oregon Coast Range. The lack of historic human development has created a refuge where relationships between biotic and abiotic ecosystem components can function under natural conditions. The ecosystem in Wasson Creek demonstrates how hydrologic, geologic, atmospheric, and biotic elements interact in a temperate rainforest.

River Values – Franklin Creek

Free flow: Franklin Creek is free-flowing along its entire length and does not contain any impoundments, diversions, or riprap that could affect free flow. Annual stream flow is primarily driven by rainfall, with peak flows occurring in the winter and low flows occurring in the summer. During the dry season (generally May through September), certain sections of the creek have no surface flow, and other sections contain isolated pools. One water right is on file for Franklin Creek, with a point of diversion on private land just downstream of the wild and scenic river corridor boundary.

Water quality: Franklin Creek is on the Clean Water Act section 303(d) list for exceeding the summer stream temperature standard set by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. This listing applies to the lower two miles of the wild and scenic river segment. The 2016 reassessment of the Forest Service's Watershed Condition Framework assigned the Dean Creek – Umpqua River watershed a water quality indicator a score of "Fair"; the 303(d) listing for Franklin Creek contributed to this score.

Scenery outstandingly remarkable value: The hydrology and geology of the creek combine with the old growth forest and topography to create an exemplary scenic setting. This determination applies to the entire length of the wild and scenic river corridor. Franklin Creek's undeveloped character also contributes to its scenic values.

Fish populations and habitat outstandingly remarkable value: Franklin Creek provides high-quality habitat for a number of native fish species, including coho, winter steelhead, fall chinook, and Pacific lamprey. Coho is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, while the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management list winter steelhead and Pacific lamprey as sensitive. Salmonid spawning

and rearing behaviors have been documented throughout the length of the wild and scenic river segment. The creek is exemplary for its relatively undisturbed drainage and intact riparian habitat.

Beaver habitat outstandingly remarkable value: Franklin Creek provides excellent habitat for beaver, which is a regionally significant species due to its role in the freshwater ecosystems of the Oregon Coast Range. High-quality beaver habitat is rare within the region of comparison due to timber harvest and development activities. Evidence of beaver activity was documented by agency staff in 2020.

Ecological systems outstandingly remarkable value: Franklin Creek showcases a nearly pristine example of the temperate rainforest ecosystems that are present in the central Oregon Coast Range. The lack of historic human development has created a refuge where relationships between biotic and abiotic ecosystem components can function under natural conditions. The ecosystem in Franklin Creek demonstrates how hydrologic, geologic, atmospheric, and biotic elements interact in a temperate rainforest.

Table 2. Outstandingly remarkable values identified for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek

Wasson Creek	Franklin Creek
Scenery	Scenery
Primitive Recreation	Fish Populations and Habitat
Fish Populations and Habitat	Beaver Habitat
Beaver Habitat	Ecological Systems
Ecological Systems	----

Proposed Wild and Scenic River Boundaries

The Act requires that each federally administered river in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System have a legally established boundary. Section 3(b) of the Act provides specific direction to the river-administering agencies.

The agency charged with the administration of each component of the national wild and scenic rivers system designated by subsection (a) of this section shall ...establish detailed boundaries...which boundaries shall include an average of not more than 320 acres of land per mile...measured from the ordinary high water mark on both sides of the river.

Establishing a wild and scenic river boundary that includes identified river-related values is essential as a basis from which to provide necessary protection. Section 10(a) of the Act describes factors which must be considered in wild and scenic river management and, therefore, provides direction on features which must be included within boundaries.

Each component of the national wild and scenic rivers system shall be administered in such manner as to protect and enhance the values which caused it to be included in said system without, insofar as is consistent therewith, limiting other uses that do not substantially interfere with public use and enjoyment of these values. In such administration, primary emphasis shall be given to protecting its aesthetic, scenic, historic, archeologic, and scientific features.

The designating legislation established interim river corridor boundaries for Franklin and Wasson Creeks of 0.25 mile on each side of the creeks as measured from the high water marks.

For Wasson Creek, in one location within the wilderness, the river administering agencies are proposing to expand the final wild and scenic river boundary to the wilderness boundary to provide for management of a visitor-created access point (an approximately 13-acre increase). Management of this access point

will provide further protection of the recreation outstandingly remarkable value. This is the only proposed modification to the interim Wasson Creek boundary.

The proposed final Franklin Creek corridor is delineated by the original interim boundary; the agencies did not identify a need for any boundary expansions. The number of acres within the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek proposed river corridors is 2,721.8 and 1408.6, respectively. Maps of the proposed boundaries are located in the comprehensive river management plan (appendix A), available on the [project web page](#), and shown on the [story map](#) for this project. The section of this environmental assessment titled “alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail” provides more information about boundary adjustments that were considered and rationale for why they were not analyzed in detail.

Proposed Visitor Use Management and Capacity

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act directs that river-administering agencies manage visitor use to protect the free-flowing conditions, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values of designated rivers. Specifically, section 3(d)(1) of the Act directs that the agencies address visitor capacities. The 1982 National Wild and Scenic Rivers System: Final Revised Guidelines for Eligibility, Classification and Management of River Areas define capacity as:

The quantity of recreation use which an area can sustain without adverse impact on the outstandingly remarkable values and free-flowing character of the river area, the quality of recreation experience, and public health and safety.

To further meet the requirement of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the guidelines note that:

Management plans will state the kinds and amounts of public use that the river can sustain without impact to the values for which it was designated.

A visitor use management strategy has been developed as a component of the comprehensive river management plan ([project web page](#)). The proposed plan addresses the need for visitor management, proposes visitor capacities, and outlines the management strategy that would be used, the items that would be monitored, and management actions that would be implemented to protect river values.

While visitor capacity estimates are a required component of the plan as mandated by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the visitor use management strategy focuses on identifying proactive approaches to address resource concerns and visitor conflicts related to recreational use within the river corridors. Responses from scoping were used to inform the development of management strategies and capacity estimates for the draft comprehensive river management plan. Visitor capacity determinations do not constitute an administrative use limit, but are used as a basis for monitoring and adaptive management actions to protect river values.

The capacity analysis was conducted by recreation staff from the Siuslaw National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management Coos Bay District, with input from the project interdisciplinary team. The analysis was finalized in June 2021 and documented in the [Capacity Report for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers](#). To determine visitor capacities for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management followed the nine-step process outlined by the Interagency Wild and Scenic River Coordinating Council. This process appears in a 2018 Council white paper entitled [Steps to Address User Capacities for Wild and Scenic Rivers](#) (IWSRCC 2018). Table 3 summarizes the detailed information provided in the comprehensive river management plan ([project web page](#)) and in the full capacity report located on the [project web page](#) and in the project record.

Table 3. Summary of capacity determinations for all geographic river management areas²

Geographic River Management Areas	Use Type	Units of Use	Capacity	Key Rationale and Assumptions
Wasson Lake and Access Road	Overnight use	People per day	6	Size of dispersed site; estimate of maximum group size
Wasson Lake and Access Road	Day use	People per day	30	Layout of dispersed site and social trails; average group size, length of stay, and length of use day
Devil's Staircase and Dark Grove	Overnight use	People per day	7	Visitor sensitivity to crowding; maximum occupancy of recreation attractions; average group size
Devil's Staircase and Dark Grove	Day use	People per day	30	Visitor sensitivity to crowding; maximum occupancy of recreation attractions; average group size, length of stay, and length of use day
Middle Wasson Creek	Combined day and overnight use	People per day	28	Desired condition for recreation access corridors; desired maximum encounter rate; terrain constraints; average group size
Franklin Creek	Combined day and overnight use	People per day	1	Desired conditions for river values, especially water quality, fish habitat, and ecological systems; current condition of extremely low recreation use

Proposed and Potential Management Actions

Section 10(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that river-administering agencies protect and enhance the designated segments' river values. Currently, the agencies are unaware of any conditions within the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek river corridors that are adversely impacting outstandingly remarkable values. However, to ensure that the agencies meet this requirement, the comprehensive river management plan includes proposed non-ground disturbing inventory actions to validate the accuracy of the baseline conditions. Non-ground disturbing management activities include conducting surveys for non-native invasive plant species; collecting lamprey DNA samples to confirm presence at Wasson Lake; conducting surveys to identify slope failures and drainage concerns along roads; and gathering data associated with surface flows (table 11, Comprehensive River Management Plan, [project web page](#)).

The comprehensive river management plan also includes potential management actions to ensure that river values are protected and enhanced into the future. Future potential management actions include revegetation of bare soil areas; snag creation, thinning and prescribed burning for wildlife habitat creation outside of the wilderness boundaries; and invasive species treatment (table 12, Comprehensive River Management Plan, [project web page](#)). The potential management actions would require site-specific analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and other federal laws.

Proposed Monitoring Plan

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and agency manual direction instructs the river-administering agencies to develop a monitoring strategy which will ensure that desired conditions are maintained or that management activities are adapted accordingly (Section 3(d)(1), FSM 2300, BLM Manual 6400). Monitoring is essential to protecting river-related values. The objective of the monitoring plan located in

² A geographic river management area is a sub-division of the river corridor for the purposes of capacity planning. The project area was sub-divided based on differences in desired conditions and current conditions, including visitor use patterns, location recreation attractions, and infrastructure.

the Wasson and Franklin Creeks Comprehensive River Management Plan ([project web page](#)) is to protect Wasson and Franklin Creek's free-flowing condition, water quality and quantity, outstandingly remarkable values, and to address visitor use. Monitoring data will help the agencies determine if management actions are necessary to protect river values from degradation.

Proposed Forest Plan Amendment

Alternative 2 proposes a programmatic forest plan amendment to add a new management area - Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers, to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan. This programmatic forest plan amendment would be applied specifically to the Forest Service portion of the Wasson and Franklin Creeks Wild and Scenic Rivers project area. The interim wild and scenic river boundaries would be adjusted and finalized, and the management area allocations that applied to the area under the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan would be amended. The wild and scenic river land allocation could apply to any wild and scenic river corridors designated in the future. Application of this allocation to areas outside of the Wasson and Franklin Creeks Wild and Scenic River corridors would require site-specific analysis and plan amendment. Management direction in the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, including Forest-wide standards and guidelines would still apply. Proposed forest-wide management direction (desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for the proposed wild and scenic river land allocation) are located in Chapter 4 - Management Direction, in the comprehensive river management plan located in the [project web page](#). In addition, desired conditions, standards, and guidelines specific to Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek wild and scenic river corridors are also included in this section of the comprehensive river management plan.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis were related to the boundary refinement process. More specifically, the river administering agencies considered a number of expansions to the wild and scenic river corridors for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek. Several boundary expansion proposals were suggested and examined by agency staff. Expansion of the Wasson Creek wild and scenic river corridor was also suggested by the public during the 30-day scoping period on the proposed action and 30-day comment period on the draft environmental analysis. All suggested boundary changes were intended to help protect the river values of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek. The boundary expansion alternatives are summarized below.

Boundary adjustments proposed by the river administering agencies' interdisciplinary team:

Early in the planning process, agency staff proposed and examined eight potential expansions to the interim Wasson Creek wild and scenic river boundary, totaling 1,865 acres. Staff also considered five potential expansions to the interim Franklin Creek wild and scenic river boundary, totaling 1,378 acres. For both creeks, most of the potential expansion areas encompassed the drainages of tributary streams. The proposed boundary expansions covered a mix of Forest Service and BLM-managed land inside and outside the wilderness boundary.

Boundary adjustments proposed by the public during the scoping period and comment period:

During the 30-day scoping period on the proposed expansion, an external organization suggested that the agencies expand the Wasson Creek wild and scenic river corridor by approximately 1,200 acres. This suggestion called for the widening of the corridor by varying amounts throughout the length of the wild and scenic river segment. The proposed expansion areas were inside and outside the wilderness on land managed by both agencies. During the 30-day comment period on the draft environmental analysis, the same organization suggested a small (approximately 10-acre) corridor expansion to encompass a single

tributary stream near the headwaters of Wasson Creek. This suggested expansion was outside of wilderness on BLM-managed land.

Refinement of the interim boundaries utilized an interdisciplinary team approach and applied a multiple step process. The internal proposed boundary refinement ideas were first brainstormed by staff in February 2020 and were revisited by the interdisciplinary team during fall 2020. During this analysis, the interdisciplinary team attempted to validate which specific river value(s) were being protected by each proposed adjustment. Additionally, the team also considered the degree to which each adjustment provided additional protection for the river values, beyond the protection offered by existing land designations. As a rule, the team did not adjust the wild and scenic river boundary onto lands where the river values of free-flow, water quality, scenery, primitive recreation, fish populations and habitat, beaver habitat, and ecological systems were otherwise protected by existing management designations. The interdisciplinary team applied these same criteria to the suggestions received from the public during the scoping period and comment period.

Most of the internally proposed wild and scenic river boundary expansions were eliminated from detailed analysis prior to the 30-day scoping period. Additionally, after the scoping period, an approximately 31 acre proposed boundary expansion (within wilderness) was removed from consideration after the interdisciplinary team reevaluated the original proposed action. This expansion was proposed as a means of protecting beaver habitat, but it was determined that the existing Wilderness designation adequately protects this outstandingly remarkable value by limiting the type of management activities that could affect beaver habitat. All proposed boundary expansions within wilderness were ultimately eliminated from detailed analysis because the wild and scenic river corridor would not offer additional protection of river values beyond the existing wilderness management direction. Agency wilderness regulations offer extensive protection of a wilderness landscape's untrammeled, natural, and undeveloped qualities, and these regulations also offer thorough protection of the river values of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek.

The agencies' interdisciplinary team worked through multiple variations of the river boundaries, especially on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management outside the wilderness boundary upstream of Wasson Lake. The areas considered for inclusion focused on lands along tributaries to Wasson Creek that are currently designated as Late Successional Reserve or Riparian Reserve. The Late Successional Reserve designation directs land managers to manage for the protection or development of older, structurally complex conifer forest, and limits harvest activities to those actions that would lead to the development of older, complex forest characteristics. Riparian Reserve direction prohibits timber salvage, except when necessary to protect public safety, or to keep roads and other infrastructure clear of debris and meets objectives and management direction of the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan (2016).

The team considered the types of activities that could occur on lands designated as Late Successional Reserve or Riparian Reserve and the potential effects of those activities as analyzed in the Bureau of Land Management, Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Resource Plans for Western Oregon (2016). The team determined that the effects of the potential activities allowed within these land use allocations, as described in the FEIS, would maintain the free-flowing nature, water quality, scenery, opportunities for primitive recreation, fish populations and habitat, beaver habitat, and ecological systems values of Wasson Creek, by protecting or developing forest structure that complements the characteristics of these lands designated as a wild and scenic river. After much consideration the team determined that the addition of these lands within the boundary of the wild and scenic river corridor, would not provide additional protection to the outstandingly remarkable values beyond the areas included within the boundary.

Therefore, the team decided to eliminate these other boundary expansions from detailed analysis because these expansion areas would not provide any additional protection to river dependent, outstandingly remarkable values, and the effects were anticipated to be substantially similar to the effects of the proposed action alternative. The Bureau of Land Management Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan and the analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (2016) provide additional information about the management direction of lands identified as Late Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve and the effects associated with this direction. Figure 3 shows a map of the lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management outside of the wilderness boundary, as requested by the public.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and the No-Action Alternative

This section identifies the issues associated with the proposed action and summarizes the potential impacts of the proposed action when compared to taking no action. The Bureau of Land Management National Environmental Policy Act Handbook identifies an issue as, “a point of disagreement, debate, or dispute with a proposed action based on some anticipated environmental effect...an issue has a cause-and-effect relationship with the proposed action or alternatives; is within the scope of the analysis; has not been decided by law, regulation, or previous decision; and is amenable to scientific analysis rather than conjecture.”. The Forest Service Handbook further describes an issue as a cause-effect relationship relating actions under consideration to effects.

Internal deliberation, public scoping, Tribal consultation, and resource analyses were conducted to identify potential issues. Potential environmental effects resulting from the proposal were considered for several resource areas including botany, cultural, fish, hydrology, scenery, recreation, and wildlife. Analyses for these resource areas found that implementation of the proposed action would have positive effects related to the congressional designation of these areas as wild and scenic river corridors. Anticipated positive effects would include the additional protection provided to these resources by boundary refinement, establishing visitor capacities, monitoring, and conducting inventorying and monitoring activities to determine future management activities to protect the outstandingly remarkable values. Resource analyses consistently found that the proposed forest plan amendment would be an administrative action and would have no effect on the resources. Resource reports have been posted to the [project webpage](#) for public review and are included in the project record.

Resource areas where no issues were identified and the analysis determined that the proposal would have no effect on that resource, have been dismissed from further discussion in this environmental assessment. The complete specialist reports are located on the [project web page](#) and in the project record. The response to comments received on the draft environmental assessment are presented at the end of this document in the Agencies and Persons consulted section.

The effects of the proposal on the scenery and recreation resources are described below. The interdisciplinary team determined that there would be no effect from the proposed action on water quality, free flow, botany, cultural resources, fish, hydrology, or wildlife, including beaver habitat because no ground disturbing activities are being proposed. There may be potential for future beneficial effects when proposed management activities are implemented to maintain the values for which the rivers were designated, but any ground disturbing activity will require future review and analysis of effects.

Scenery and Recreation

Issues Addressed

- How will the proposed action affect trails and public recreation access in the project area?
- How will the proposed action affect the recreation setting in the project area? Specifically, how will opportunities for primitive recreation be affected?
- How will the proposed action affect the scenic resource in the project area? Specifically, will the proposed action cause the scenic resource to fall below a visual quality objective of preservation?

Methodology

To assess current conditions and potential impacts, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management gathered site-specific information from a combination of site visits, GIS datasets, photographs, and historical data. Data on visitor use patterns and visitor preferences were gathered from field surveys, traffic counters, visual assessments, and conversations with external organizations. Information on existing recreation management direction was also gathered from the Bureau of Land Management's Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan, the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan, agency handbooks and manuals, and legislation. The IDT used this background information to inform its analysis of resource impacts by giving current condition and anticipate effects of implementation or adopting plan.

For the purpose of this analysis, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management assume the proposed action will not substantially increase the frequency or intensity of visitor use. This assumption is based on the remote location, rugged terrain, and lack of accessibility within the project area. The proposed action does not include any development of system trails, parking areas, or developed sites, and this lack of new infrastructure further reinforces the assumption that use will remain low. Advanced backcountry hikers will continue to visit the project area in small numbers, but most visitors who are displaced due to high use in other areas will choose to go elsewhere.

Environmental Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects of No Action

Comprehensive River Management Plan

Under the no-action alternative, current management of Wasson and Franklin Creeks would continue. No comprehensive river management plan would be developed, and management would not comply with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Both river corridors would continue to provide high quality recreation and scenery, with outstanding opportunities for solitude, primitive recreation, and immersion in natural scenery. Existing management direction would continue to protect the primitive and untrammeled character of the river corridors, though no outstandingly remarkable value-specific standards and guidelines would be applied.

Interim River Boundaries

Interim wild and scenic river corridors would remain in place along the designated segments of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek. The provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act apply within the interim boundaries, including the wild and scenic river classifications provided by Congress. Both wild and scenic rivers are classified as wild; wild and scenic river classifications describe conditions at the time of designation, and agencies are required to maintain these characteristics.

Agency policy in FSM 2350 and BLM Manual 6400 would continue to prescribe direction for a range of activities in wild river corridors, and this guidance would be followed for all management decisions in the project area. Wild river corridors are conducive to primitive recreation opportunities and outstanding natural scenery.

Visitor Capacity

There would be no visitor capacity in place for the project area. Visitor use and visitor impacts on scenery and the recreation setting would not be monitored consistently. The agencies would not establish specific indicators, triggers, thresholds, or monitoring protocols to respond to trends in resource conditions as they relate to visitor use. Management actions in response to unacceptable visitor use impacts would not be consistently identified.

Management and Inventory Actions

Under the no-action alternative, no data collection or inventory efforts would be conducted specific to Wasson and Franklin Creeks. Adaptive management activities would not be implemented in response to potential resource impacts or visitor use conflicts.

Monitoring Plan

There would be no monitoring plan in place for the project area. The agencies would not specify monitoring protocols, indicators, triggers, or thresholds to measure trends in scenery and the recreation setting. In practice, this means that the agencies would have limited abilities to identify and adaptively manage for changes to current conditions. Broader-scale programmatic monitoring (as specified in the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan and the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan) may draw data from the project area, but these monitoring protocols would not be focused on the resources and landscapes of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek.

Forest Plan Amendment

Under the no-action alternative, no new management area and associated land use allocations would be added to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan. The existing Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan management direction for Management Area 11 – Undeveloped areas would apply to the Forest Service-managed portion of Wasson Creek and to Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers. This includes the recreation opportunity spectrum classifications of semi-primitive non-motorized and roaded natural. Management Area 11 provides a high level of protection for scenic and primitive recreational values in the project area, though to a smaller degree than would the proposed Designated Wild and Scenic River Management Area.

Effects of the Proposed Action

Comprehensive River Management Plan

The comprehensive river management plan contains desired conditions, standards, and guidelines related to the protection and enhancement of the scenery and primitive recreation outstandingly remarkable values. Desired conditions for primitive recreation would call for the continued provision of “outstanding opportunities for solitude, exploration, personal challenge, self-reliance...and immersion in a natural setting.” The desired conditions would also specify low concentrations of visitors, opportunities for dark skies, minimal evidence of human use, and an essentially unmodified setting for primitive recreation. Desired conditions for scenery would instruct the agencies to continue meeting the area’s *preservation* visual quality objective while protecting the individual natural components that contribute to an outstanding scenic setting.

The comprehensive river management plan's standards and guidelines would operationalize these desired conditions by stating what the agencies shall and should do to maintain the scenery and recreation outstandingly remarkable values. Lastly, the River Values Report within the comprehensive river management plan documents the existing conditions of these resource values at the time of designation; this information would provide a baseline that will guide the agencies' protect and enhance mandate.

These comprehensive river management plan components would complement the existing wilderness designation by providing an additional layer of protection for the primitive recreation setting and scenery. All potential agency actions would align with these desired conditions, standards, and guidelines. In practice, these plan components would result in very limited on-the-ground changes to the recreation setting and the scenic resource. This is because (1) the provisions of the Wilderness Act already strongly protect these river values and (2) the existing condition of the project area is rugged, undeveloped, and nearly pristine, and these comprehensive river management plan components would compel the agencies to continue maintaining these current conditions.

Final Wild and Scenic River Corridor Boundaries

As described in the proposed action, the proposed final wild and scenic river corridor for Wasson Creek is slightly larger than the interim boundary. The final proposed corridor for Franklin Creek is unchanged from the interim boundary. One of the proposed expansions for the Wasson Creek boundary is intended to improve the agency's ability to respond to potential visitor use impacts. During the planning process, staff identified a 13.3-acre corridor expansion in T. 21 S., R. 10 W., Section 23. This corridor expansion fills the gap between the interim corridor and the wilderness boundary, and also includes an area that is traversed by a social trail to Wasson Creek. By including this social trail segment in the corridor, the agencies will be able to adaptively respond if visitor use along this segment is degrading river values. Preliminary surveys suggest that this is one of the more popular social trails in the project area; these current conditions make it especially important to monitor encounters, monitor trail conditions, and implement management actions if conditions are degraded.

Visitor Capacity

The proposed action includes a visitor capacity framework to protect the river values for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek, available on the [project website](#). This capacity framework would function as a management tool to help the agencies prevent degradation of the primitive recreation and scenery outstandingly remarkable values. The agencies used professional judgement, informed assumptions, and best available data to develop day use and overnight use capacities for each sub-unit of the project area. Capacities are intended to be protective of all river values; if visitor use levels are at or below capacity, the agencies anticipate there will be no river value degradation. In addition to numeric capacity calculations, the agencies' capacity framework prescribes indicators, triggers, thresholds, monitoring, and management actions that would help track trends in river values and correct any degradation that is resulting from visitor use.

Capacity estimates were calculated based on the sensitivities and desired conditions of the limiting attribute for each geographic river management area. For the purposes of the capacity calculation, the limiting attribute is defined as the river value that would be unacceptably degraded at the lowest level of visitor use. Primitive recreation was identified as the limiting attribute in two of the Wasson Creek geographic river management areas (Devil's Staircase, Dark Grove, and Middle Wasson). These capacity calculations are also intended to be protective of the scenery outstandingly remarkable value since scenery was found to be less sensitive than the primitive recreation outstandingly remarkable value in these geographic river management areas. For the other two geographic river management areas (Wasson

Lake and Access Road and Franklin Creek), the capacity estimates are protective of recreation and scenery even though neither river value was the basis for the calculation.

Staff accounted for potential and actual visitor use impacts when identifying the limiting attributes and estimating capacities. Visitor use has the potential to degrade the primitive recreation outstandingly remarkable value by causing crowding and increased encounters with other visitors. Visitor use can degrade the scenery outstandingly remarkable value when visitors leave behind trash, abandoned fire rings, or trampled vegetation. Agency management actions in response to visitor use (installation of signs or additional facilities) could also degrade both outstandingly remarkable values. These vulnerabilities (and others) were factored into the agencies' capacity determinations, and the agencies would monitor for these potential impacts as part of comprehensive river management plan implementation.

The agencies' current information indicates that visitor use is below capacity for all sub-units of the project area. Additionally, the agencies predict that visitor use will remain below capacity into the future. This assumption is based on the rugged, remote, and generally inaccessible conditions of the wild and scenic river corridors.

In the event that visitor use increases above capacity, or in the event that river value triggers or thresholds are exceeded due to visitor use, the agencies would be obligated to take action to prevent river value degradation. These adaptive management actions are discussed in the monitoring sub-section. Some of these potential future actions (if ever implemented) would affect visitor access to the project area, but they would only be implemented if the agencies predicted a net positive effect to river values. The environmental effects of these actions would be analyzed in separate National Environmental Policy Act decisions.

Proposed and Potential Management and Inventory Actions

Construction of system trails is identified as an adaptive management action if monitoring indicates that visitor use is degrading river values. If the agencies determine a need for system trails, this action would be analyzed in a subsequent National Environmental Policy Act decision. The need for new system trails would be carefully tied to the protection and enhancement of river values.

Social trails would continue to be present in the project area, though the agencies would take a more active approach to tracking visitation and river value conditions along these travel corridors (see the monitoring sub-section). If monitoring showed that river value triggers were met, the agencies may close and rehabilitate certain social trail segments, or potentially direct visitors to new system trail(s). As an adaptive management response, the agencies may install limited on-site visitor information (such as Leave No Trace messaging) at unofficial parking areas if monitoring indicates a need for more on-site visitor information. The agencies would also remove visitor-installed signs and trail flagging if these items conflict with sign standards or degrade scenic or recreational outstandingly remarkable values.

Monitoring Plan

The monitoring plan contains several items that are related to trails and access, recreation setting, and scenery. For example, there are monitoring protocols related to visitor encounters, trash, trampled vegetation, and abandoned fire rings. Many of these monitoring items are also included in the visitor capacity framework.

For each monitoring item, the plan prescribes indicators, thresholds, and management actions that would help the agencies respond to degradation of the creeks' recreational or scenic resources. In most cases, management responses are escalating; if triggers are reached, initial actions typically involve new signage and other measures that have low impacts on the visitor experience. If these initial actions are not

successful, the agencies will implement more restrictive and noticeable measures such as designated sites or limited entry systems. This system of escalating responses recognizes that management intervention can have negative impacts on certain river values (especially recreation and scenery), even if the goal is to reduce impacts on other values. If management action is necessary, agencies will implement the measure with the lowest possible collateral impacts.

Forest Plan Amendment

The forest plan amendment contains desired conditions, goals, standards, and guidelines that are protective of the project area's primitive recreation and scenery outstandingly remarkable values. These plan components would complement the wilderness provisions and the comprehensive river management plan components and add another layer of protection for the area's river values. In practice, these plan components would not result in on-the-ground changes to the recreation setting or scenic resources, for the same reasons that are described in the comprehensive river management plan sub-section.

This plan amendment would move the Forest Service portion of the project area from MA-11-Undeveloped to the new Designated Wild and Scenic River Management Area. For wild rivers, the Designated Wild and Scenic River Management Area would be more restrictive than MA-11 with regard to trail construction, developed recreation facilities, and other actions that impact the recreation setting. The new management area would also prescribe the higher visual quality objective of preservation rather than retention. On-the-ground changes would be minimal due to the existing wilderness designation and the area's current undeveloped character.

The plan amendment would re-classify the Forest Service portion of the project area to a recreation opportunity spectrum of primitive. Out of the six possible recreation opportunity spectrum classifications, the primitive classification has the lowest thresholds for developed facilities, ease of access, sights and sounds of human use, and visible management presence. It also has the lowest target encounter rate (no more than six groups or individuals per day). The differences between primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized are marginal, and for the purposes of this project, many of the differences between primitive and roaded natural have already been overridden by the wilderness designation. The most significant change would be the lowered appropriate encounter rate from 6 to 15 (semi-primitive non-motorized) to no higher than 6 (primitive). The change would not lead to direct reductions in public access, but the agencies used the primitive encounter rate in the wild and scenic river capacity determinations. This encounter rate would also inform any subsequent decisions on administrative visitor use limits, if monitoring indicates that such actions are necessary.

The agencies do not anticipate any effects on trails and access, recreation setting, or visual quality objectives. The proposed action does not include development of any new trails, parking areas, or developed sites, and there are no other plans or proposals that would add additional infrastructure to the project area.

The overlapping wilderness and wild and scenic river designations would provide complementary layers of protection for primitive recreation opportunities and scenic resources. This would be applicable throughout the project area. The Devil's Staircase Wilderness extends beyond the wild and scenic river corridors, and this would provide an additional buffer of resource protection around much of the project area.

Consistency with Relevant Laws, Policy, and Regulations

Bureau of Land Management Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan

The proposed action is in conformance with the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan, including the management direction for Congressionally Reserved Lands and National Conservation Lands.

The proposed action will not alter the management direction for protecting the project area's wilderness characteristics. The designation of an overlapping wild and scenic river provides additional and complementary protections for the area's designation as Wilderness.

The Bureau of Land Management-managed lands within the project area are classified as Visual Resource Management Class I. Visual resource management classes are assigned through the resource management plan. The Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan assigned lands in Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and designated and suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers that are classified as Wild to VRM Class I (RMP, p. 94). The objective of this class is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. Class I allows for natural ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activity, as long as the level of change to the landscape is low and does not attract attention. The Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan prohibits activities that would disrupt the existing character of the landscape for areas designated to this visual resource class.

The proposed action complements this visual resource class by recognizing scenery as an outstandingly remarkable value for Wasson Creek and requiring the Bureau of Land Management to "protect and enhance" this outstandingly remarkable value as defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This direction is consistent with a landscape dominated by natural features.

Wasson Creek is also designated as an Extensive Recreation Management Area in the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan. Extensive Recreation Management Areas are administrative units that require special management consideration in order to address recreation use and demand. The Wasson Creek Extensive Recreation Management Area is associated with primitive recreation use in a pristine and remote area, and the district's management framework seeks to maintain this setting. The proposed action would designate primitive recreation as an outstandingly remarkable value for Wasson Creek; this designation would be consistent with how the Bureau of Land Management manages the Wasson Creek Extensive Recreation Management Area.

Conclusions

Agency staff have concluded that the proposed action would not affect trails and access. No new system trails would be developed, and there are no immediate plans to curtail social trail access to the project area. Social trail routes would be monitored for unacceptable impacts to river values, and the agencies would also monitor the project area for visitor use impacts. Additionally, the proposed action would complement the existing opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the project area. The overlapping wild and scenic river and wilderness designations, combined with existing plan-level guidance, would collectively provide strong protection for primitive recreation opportunities. Lastly, the proposed action would protect the existing scenic integrity of the project area; existing scenery management standards would continue to be met and the wild and scenic designation provides an additional layer of protection.

Other Disclosures

Evaluation of the Forest Plan Amendment

As discussed previously in this environmental assessment, the Forest Service has identified a need to amend the 1990 Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan to add a new management area, Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan, to establish the final wild and scenic river boundaries, and change the underlying management allocations.

The need for this programmatic forest plan amendment closely ties to the purpose and need for the project, which includes developing a comprehensive river management plan to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values, water quality, and free-flowing characteristics of these rivers; establishing the final river corridor boundaries; and revising management areas and existing standards and guidelines for lands within the river corridor.

Based on the direction provided in 36 CFR § 219, the Responsible Official must determine the appropriate scope and scale of forest plan amendments and which substantive provisions of 36 CFR § 219.8 through 219.11 apply to the project. Based on the need for change, the site-specific conditions for the project area, and the relevant forest-specific information and data, the following substantive requirements of 36 CFR § 219.8 through 219.11 apply to the proposed amendment.

36 CFR § 219.8(a)(2)(iii) and (a)(2)(iv) – to maintain or restore water quality and water resources

Water quality and resources were considered in the development of the proposed boundary changes and associated changes to the land use allocations. Designated rivers must be managed to protect water quality. After implementation of the plan amendments proposed under the proposed action, the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan would continue to provide the necessary components, mainly in the standards and guidelines, for protection of soil, water, riparian, wild and scenic rivers, and overall watershed function to meet the substantive requirement listed above. In addition, the new standards and guidelines would apply additional standards and guidelines that would maintain water quality and protection of the free-flowing condition of Wasson and Franklin Creeks.

Specifically, wild and scenic river standards would require new recreational facilities within the management area to be consistent with the river classification and to protect the water quality of the river. The new standards also require that the water quality of the rivers be maintained or enhanced to meet the state and national goals for water quality. Retired roads within the wild and scenic river corridor would be blocked and road surfaces stabilized and narrowed to minimize negative impacts to water quality. Human activities that degrade water quality would be mitigated or prevented. Mining standards would maintain streambanks in their natural conditions and not allow salable mineral activities within the bed and banks of recreation or scenic rivers. Further, standards in the new Wild And Scenic River Management Area require that accessibility be compatible with the river classification.

36 CFR § 219.8(a)(3)(i) -- to maintain or restore the ecological integrity of riparian areas in the plan area including plan components to maintain or restore structure, function, composition, and connectivity

The ecological integrity of the riparian areas was considered in the development of the proposed final boundaries and proposed addition of a new management area and land use allocation. The interdisciplinary team developed the ecological systems outstandingly remarkable value in recognition of the exemplary ecosystem processes that are occurring within the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek

watersheds. This is an interdisciplinary or holistic outstandingly remarkable value that describes the interactions between ecosystem elements (including water, climate, plant communities, wildlife, and geology) in a natural, nearly pristine setting. During the evaluation process, the interdisciplinary team determined that none of the standard outstandingly remarkable value categories could adequately describe the significance of the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek entire intact ecosystems.

The development of new standards and guidelines that protects the ecological outstandingly remarkable value meets the substantive requirement listed above. In addition, Riparian Reserves and Wilderness designations would not change and would continue to overlap with the new land use allocations. Existing standards and guidelines that provide for the maintenance of ecological integrity would not change, and the new standards and guidelines would be applied and complement the existing direction to protect the free-flowing character, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values.

The resource-specific analyses in the “Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action” section of this environmental assessment and in the project record provides more detail and analysis on the proposed forest plan amendment and this substantive requirement.

36 CFR § 219.10(a)(1) – Integrated resource management for multiple use shall consider: Aesthetic values, air quality, cultural and heritage resources, ecosystem services, fish and wildlife species, forage, geologic features, grazing and rangelands, habitat and habitat connectivity, recreation settings and opportunities, riparian areas, scenery, soil, surface and subsurface water quality, timber, trails, vegetation, viewsheds, wilderness, and other relevant resources and uses.

The goal of the Wasson and Franklin Creeks Wild and Scenic Rivers Comprehensive River Management Plan is to protect and enhance the river values for which Wasson and Franklin Creeks were included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. These include fish populations and habitat, beaver habitat, scenery, primitive recreation, and ecological systems. The implementation of the proposed forest plan amendment would provide the necessary components, mainly in the new standards and guidelines for protection of the outstandingly remarkable values, to meet this substantive requirement. The new standards and guidelines would provide additional protection for water quality, vegetation, geologic features, and recreation settings and opportunities.

The proposed action provides for protection of aesthetic values within the river corridors. This is accomplished in the comprehensive river management plan through visual resource management direction for each river corridor identified through visual quality objectives, and baseline condition descriptions that address specific scenic features and qualities of each of the river segments. Monitoring is intended to identify and adjust human uses that threaten to degrade scenic quality.

The resource-specific analyses in the “Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action” section of this environmental assessment and in the project record provides more detail and analysis on the proposed forest plan amendment and this substantive requirement.

36 CFR § 219.10(b)(1)(i) Sustainable recreation; including recreation settings, opportunities, and access; and scenic character. Recreation opportunities may include non-motorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and in the air.

Sustainable recreation was considered in the development of the proposed final boundaries and proposed addition of a new management area and land use allocation. Implementation of the proposed forest plan amendment would provide sustainable opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in a rugged

wilderness setting. Personal challenge, isolation, and undisturbed surroundings are key elements of the recreation experience in Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek that meet the above substantive criteria.

The resource-specific analyses in the “Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action” section of this environmental assessment and in the project record provides more detail and analysis on the proposed forest plan amendment and this substantive requirement.

36 CFR § 219.10(b)(1)(v) Protection of designated wild and scenic rivers as well as management of rivers found eligible or determined suitable for the National Wild and Scenic River system to protect the values that provide the basis for their suitability for inclusion in the system.

Adding a new management area, modifying associated land use allocations, and finalizing the wild and scenic river corridor boundaries protects and enhances the rivers values for which Wasson and Franklin Creeks were designated, in compliance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Existing Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan management direction for potential wild and scenic rivers would still apply to eligible or determined suitable rivers to protect the values that provide the basis for their suitability for inclusion in the system.

The resource-specific analyses in the “Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action” section of this environmental assessment and in the project record provides more detail and analysis on the proposed forest plan amendment and this substantive requirement.

Effects of Proposed Forest Plan Amendment

Alternative 1 – No Change from Current Management

Under alternative 1, the land allocation for Designated Wild and Scenic River corridors would not be added to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan. There would be no change to the land allocations along the current river corridor. All existing allocations under the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan would remain in effect as well as the interim wild and scenic boundary. No comprehensive river management plan would be adopted and the area would continue under the interim direction of the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan. Administration of Wasson and Franklin Creeks would not be in compliance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The proposed action would add a new management area - Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers - to the Siuslaw Land and Resource Management Plan. Adjusting and finalizing the boundaries of Wasson and Franklin Creeks Wild and Scenic Rivers, and their underlying management areas, would allow for new standards and guidelines to help protect the outstanding remarkable values, as well as preserve the free-flowing conditions and water quality of the river corridors. As this project is administrative in nature and does not propose ground-disturbing actions, there would be no effects from the proposed action. Additional analyses would be required for any future proposed ground-disturbing management actions.

The new Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers Management Area could only be applied to other specific locations through the analysis of additional forest plan amendments. Those site-specific river corridors would be evaluated at that time.

The proposed action meets the requirements of the substantive provisions as described in detail above.

Tribal Consultation

The Bureau of Land Management and the Siuslaw National Forest outreached to three federally recognized Tribes with ancestral connections to the project area: The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians. The agencies have provided updates and key information to tribal representatives throughout the duration of this project. Planning documents have been made available for review by tribal staff, and federal staff have presented project information at annual agency-tribal program of work coordination meetings. In particular, the agencies have engaged with the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians regarding continued access to the project area for traditional and cultural uses. This access will be maintained through the selected alternative as it does not propose any changes to public access or activities.

Agencies and Persons Consulted

In July 2020, the agencies conducted a targeted outreach to external entities who were likely to have knowledge and interest in the management of Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek. External entities were sent a copy of the agencies' preliminary river values report and were given an opportunity to provide input on current condition descriptions, outstandingly remarkable value determinations, and data sources. In total, the agencies sent outreach materials to three Tribes, two Federal agencies, one state agency, six organizations, two watershed councils, and two individuals. The agencies received responses from six recipients, and this information was incorporated into the interdisciplinary team's current condition inventories and outstandingly remarkable value determinations.

In February 2021, the agencies solicited comments on the public's interests, knowledge, and values regarding Wasson Creek, Franklin Creek, and Devil's Staircase Wilderness. This comment opportunity was not part of a National Environmental Policy Act process for any specific proposed action. Instead, due to the overlapping Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designations, the agencies asked the public for input on the overall management of the landscapes and resources within the project area. For this comment opportunity, the agencies employed an ArcGIS online comment platform with a georeferenced commenting option; this platform also provided a map of the project area, a description of law and policy for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, and a preview of the upcoming planning process.

The agencies received a total of 14 comments through the online platform and via email. These comments provided additional information for the river values report, and also contributed to the interdisciplinary team's preparation of desired conditions and potential management actions. Comments covered a variety of topics, including: the project area's undeveloped, natural, and primitive character; trails and access; fish and wildlife habitat; road management; signs and public information; land acquisition; and active management.

On March 24, 2021, the agencies distributed scoping packages to 1,816 individuals, organizations, permittees, agencies, and congressional representatives. A public news release was also made available to local media on March 24, 2021. The Wasson and Franklin Creeks Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan project was identified on the Siuslaw National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and on the Coos Bay Bureau of Land Management's National NEPA Register beginning April 2021. The scoping period was 30 days, beginning March 24, 2021 and ending April 23, 2021. Eight comment letters were received from external audiences.

The following is a summary of key themes and recommendations received in the comments:

- **Ecological importance and general protection of lands, waters, and river values:** On the whole, commenters discussed the ecological importance of the landscapes and waters within the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek drainages and encouraged the agencies to protect these areas as thoroughly as possible. Multiple commenters discussed the project area's importance as high-quality and contiguous habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species. This habitat was seen as especially important due to climate change and habitat fragmentation outside the wilderness.
- **Suggested changes to proposed wild and scenic river corridor boundaries:** Commenters recommended that the agencies widen the proposed wild and scenic river corridor boundaries to encompass the drainages of the "small tributaries and headwalls" that flow into the creeks. Comments suggested this was especially important on the Bureau of Land Management-managed portion of Wasson Creek that is outside the wilderness. The interdisciplinary team had previously considered many of these boundary additions but chose to exclude them because overlapping designations provided sufficient protection of river values. The interdisciplinary team revisited these boundary recommendations in light of this recommendation. See the alternatives considered but not studied in detail section of this document for further discussion on how these comments were considered.
- **Trails and access:** Several commenters emphasized the importance of the primitive recreation opportunities within the project area. Commenters opposed construction or formal designation of any new non-motorized trails in the wild and scenic river corridors and the wilderness. There are concerns that new official trails will lead to heavier use, spread of invasive species, trash, and other issues that can degrade river values. One commenter specifically asked the units to "prioritize review of a recreation management plan that maintains the wilderness/wild and scenic river's primitive backcountry character." The commenters suggest that the closed 4100 Road (mostly outside the project area) could be managed as a non-motorized trail if the agencies deem it necessary. One of the comment letters also requested that the units barricade a Bureau of Land Management road leading to a popular hiker access point for Wasson Creek.
- **Roads:** Some commenters favored decommissioning and rehabilitation of closed roads within the wilderness and near the wild and scenic river corridors, especially road corridors near the wilderness boundary. These comments state that such decommissioning will have ecological benefits while reducing trespass from motorized and mechanized use. It is possible that the agencies and external organizations have different definitions of "road decommissioning" and "road rehabilitation," and this consideration will be incorporated into interdisciplinary analyses.
- **Land acquisition and management of areas outside wilderness:** One group spoke favorably of the Wasson Forest Land and Water Conservation Fund acquisition and encouraged the units to consider acquisition of additional private parcels near the wild and scenic river corridors. Land acquisition strategies can be considered within the comprehensive river management plan. The organization also encouraged the agencies to manage land outside of the wilderness and wild and scenic river corridors in a manner that was protective of the wild and scenic river values.

On January 6, 2022, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management asked for public comment on the draft environmental assessment, the draft comprehensive river management plan, and associated reports. The agencies accepted comments for 30 days and received eight responses during this time. The agencies reviewed these comments, prepared comment responses in table 4, and made the corresponding changes in the final environmental assessment and the final comprehensive river management plan.

On July 13, 2022, the Bureau of Land Management released its draft decision record and draft finding of no significant impact for the comprehensive river management plan. The agency accepted public

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comments on the documents for 15 days. Updated drafts of the comprehensive river management plan and environmental assessment were also available for public review at this time. The Bureau of Land Management received four comment responses through the agency's E-Planning system. The agency's summary of these comments will appear in the final decision record for the comprehensive river management plan.

Figure 3 shows a map of land use designations in the eastern Wasson Creek drainage as requested by the public. Wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers are designated by Congress. Lands designated as Wilderness or Wild and Scenic Rivers by Congress are allocated to Congressionally Reserved and Lands and National Conservation Lands in the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan. Late-Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve are land use allocations in the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan. The Wasson Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern is located entirely within the Devil's Staircase Wilderness and is, therefore, not shown on this map.

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Table 4. Response to comments received on the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Environmental Assessment and Comprehensive River Management Plan

Topic	General Comment Description	Response
Project Support	Support for the Wild and Scenic River designation and the resource protections it will provide.	Thank you for support of the Comprehensive River Management Plan for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River corridors.
Invasive plant species management	Concern about the language describing the use of herbicides for invasive plant species management within the wilderness boundaries.	Invasive species management treatments, including the use of herbicides, is not a proposed action in this EA. The comprehensive river management plan identifies that invasive plant species infestations will be monitored to determine if action is needed. It also states that invasive species infestations should be minimized or eradicated through early detection and rapid response using an integrated pest management approach. The determination of treatment strategy is a project-level decision based on the location, type, and size of individual infestation. Treatment actions within the Devil's Staircase Wilderness will be analyzed according to wilderness law and policy (including Minimum Requirements Analyses for prohibited uses within the wilderness).
Actions to restore natural processes	Concern about the actions listed to maintain or restore natural processes, including prescribed fire and thinning, cited in the Ecological and Botanical Effects Analysis.	The passage cited by the commenter comes from the 2016 Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan and was cited in the Ecological and Botanical Effects Analysis as "representative broad protections" identified in the plan. Prescribed fire and thinning are not planned as part of this EA for the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River corridors.
Management for plant community groups	Concern about plant community groups cited in the Ecological and Botanical Effects Analysis, believing they are not appropriate for the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek drainages.	The passage cited by the commenter comes from the 2016 Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan and was cited in the Ecological and Botanical Effects Analysis as "representative broad protections" identified in the plan. Management actions for these plant communities are not planned as part of this EA for the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River corridors.
Hazard Tree Removal	Request that site specific data for tree heights be used in the analysis of hazard tree removal.	The Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan is not proposing hazard tree removal.
Rehabilitation of Social Trails and Campsites	Request that management strategies such as proper education, signs and re-routing be exhausted before closures are enacted.	A new general guideline R-07-G has been added to the management direction for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek on page 36: "Except for unique circumstances, management actions to protect river values should minimize impacts to visitor access and choice of activity. In general, if river value degradation is detected, managers should initially implement interventions with few to no visitor restrictions. If these initial actions do not achieve the desired results, more restrictive and intensive actions should be implemented." This principle is briefly discussed on page 50 of the draft CRMP and on page 2 of the capacity report.

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Topic	General Comment Description	Response
User Capacity	Concern that user capacity might be too high for Devil's Staircase and Dark Grove.	The agencies acknowledge that there are assumptions, uncertainties, and risks associated with the visitor capacity determinations; these considerations are documented in the <i>Capacity Report for Wasson Creek Wild & Scenic River and Franklin Creek Wild & Scenic River</i> . In recognition of these factors, the agencies will strive to implement the recommended monitoring plan. The capacity framework is adaptive; if monitoring indicates that river degradation is occurring, or that the capacity determinations are too high, the agencies have the ability to adjust the capacity determinations and implement appropriate management actions to protect river values.
User Capacity	Concern that the user capacity number was set arbitrarily and is limiting access to public lands.	The full capacity analysis is documented in the <i>Capacity Report for Wasson Creek Wild & Scenic River and Franklin Creek Wild & Scenic River</i> . The capacity determination is based on an assessment of river values, current conditions, visitor use patterns, and potential visitor use impacts to river values. The report also discloses the analysis' assumptions, uncertainties, and recommended monitoring plan. The capacity determination is not an administrative use limit that leads to enforcement of access restrictions. Instead, capacity is a tool for helping managers identify when and how to intervene to protect river values.
Concern about loss of motorized access	Concern that the elements included in the Comprehensive River Management Plan would result in a loss of opportunity for motorized access.	Motorized access is prohibited within the Devil's Staircase Wilderness as designated by Congress in the Wilderness Act. The Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive River Management Plan does not change any existing motorized access. The majority of the wild and scenic river corridors are located within the Devil's Staircase Wilderness, which is managed to protect wilderness characteristics, and the small portions of the river corridor outside of the wilderness boundary do not propose a change to existing access. The comprehensive river management plan was drafted to maintain and manage for outstandingly remarkable values, which include opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in a rugged wilderness setting.
Access to private land	Concern that the wild designation of the Wasson and Franklin Creeks could result in a loss of access to private property.	Neither the proposed action or the designation of the wild and scenic river corridors for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek will result in a loss of access to private property because the management plan will not affect existing rights of way.
Acquisition of lands adjacent to the project area	Support for the Forest Service acquisition of lands adjacent to the wilderness boundary and request for the BLM to consider acquiring specific parcels.	The acquisition of lands is outside the scope of this project to develop a comprehensive river management plan for Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Wild and Scenic Rivers.
Organized recreation events	Concern that members of the public will lose the opportunity to organize recreational events.	The Wasson Creek and Franklin Creeks Wild and Scenic River project area does not have a known history of organized recreational events. The comprehensive river management plan does not propose to change existing access to the project area.

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Topic	General Comment Description	Response
Buffer zones	Concern that buffer zones are being created outside the wilderness area. Especially concerned with guideline R-04-G - Social trails that intrude visually on the river corridor should be obliterated.	<p>There are no buffer zones being created or proposed.</p> <p>On p.54 of the Wasson Creek and Franklin Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan it identifies that Section 3(b) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act requires that each federally administered river have a legally established boundary. These boundaries are shown on the maps in the environmental assessment and the comprehensive river management plan and were determined to be the area that would be managed to protect the outstandingly remarkable values identified. The Wild and Scenic River boundaries are separate from the Devil's Staircase Wilderness boundary, although both are displayed on the maps.</p> <p>The comprehensive river management plan does not propose to change existing access to the project area. The plan does identify potential management actions that could be taken if outstandingly remarkable values were being compromised. Guideline R-04-G will only be applied within the wild and scenic river corridor if monitoring indicates that river values are being degraded. The language of the guideline has been revised to reflect the scope and intent.</p>
Inclusion of additional areas in the Wild and Scenic River boundary	Request that a mapped tributary in the headwaters of Wasson Creek be included in the Wild and Scenic River Corridor.	The Land Use Allocations for this area is identified as Late-Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve and will be managed in accordance with 2016 Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plan.
Mature and Old Growth Forest	Request that the final draft of the comprehensive plan maintains a recognition that mature and old growth forest are part of the "Ecological systems outstandingly remarkable value".	The final comprehensive river management plan (pp. 22-23) identifies the importance of the late seral Douglas-fir and western hemlock-dominated forests for old growth dependent species and as undisturbed reference landscapes.
Management Allocations outside wilderness boundary	Request to display the management allocations of BLM lands outside the wilderness boundary but within the headwaters of Wasson Creek.	The final environmental assessment includes a map of the BLM land-use allocations of the headwaters of Wasson Creek (Figure 3 below) that are located outside the wilderness boundary as requested by the commenter. The land use allocations for these areas are late-successional reserve and riparian reserve.

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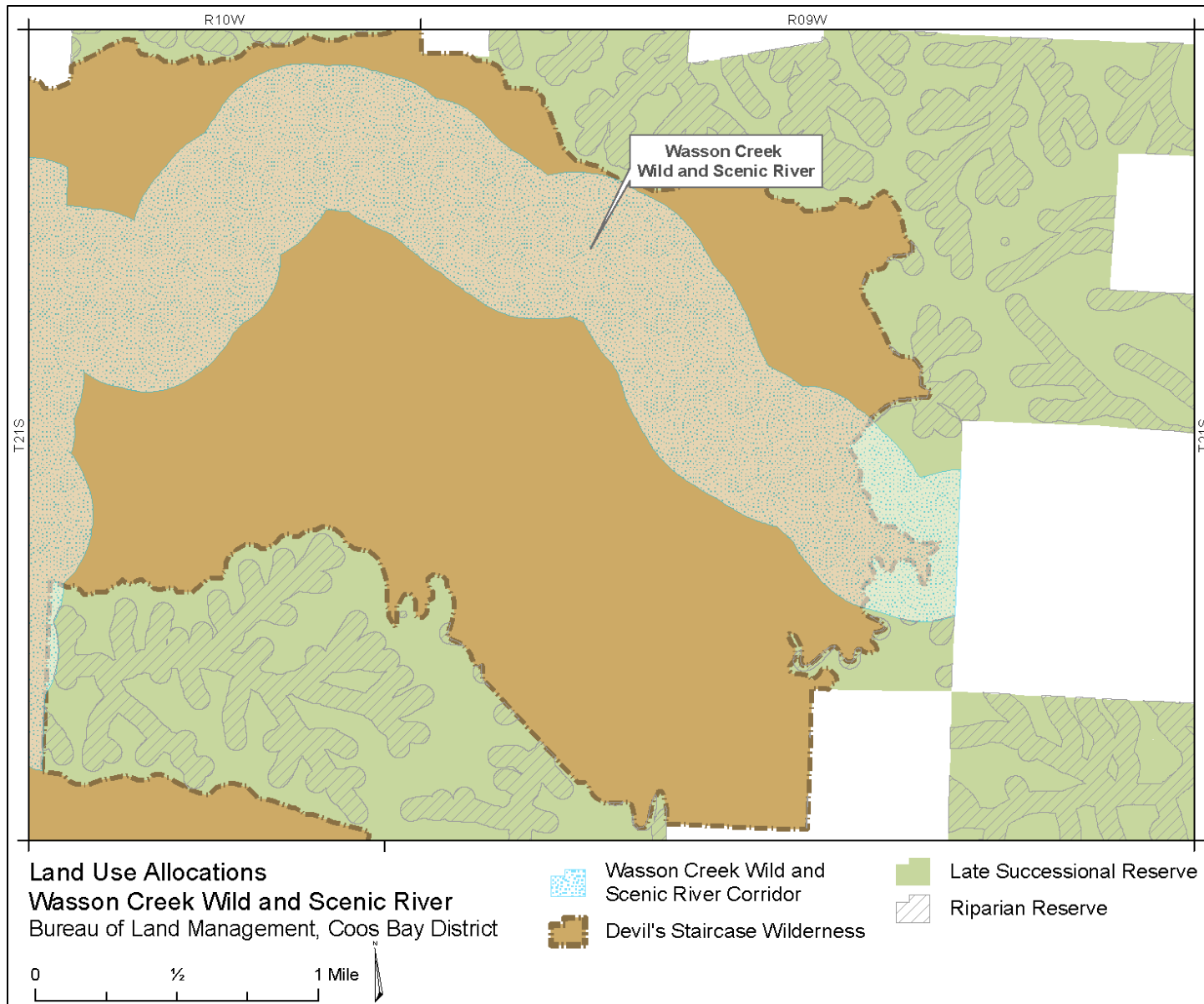


Figure 3. Map of land use allocations in the eastern Wasson Creek drainage

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