



USDA FOREST SERVICE

RECORD OF DECISION

MT. HOOD MEADOWS SKI AREA MASTER PLAN
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT No. 10

HOOD RIVER RANGER DISTRICT, MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST

Responsible Official: Roberta A. Moltzen, Forest Supervisor

HOOD RIVER COUNTY, OREGON

JANUARY, 1997

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RECORD OF DECISION

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Forest Plan Amendment No. 10

Mt. Hood National Forest U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service Hood River and Zigzag Ranger Districts Hood River County, Oregon

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

In March 1988, Mt. Hood Meadows Oregon, Ltd. (permittee or MHM) presented to the Mt. Hood National Forest (MHNH) a proposed concept and two alternatives for a new Master Plan for the Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Area (MHM) intended to replace the current Master Plan, authorized by a 1978 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The current Master Plan authorizes MHM to operate as a day-use ski area with a maximum capacity of 8,600 persons-at-one-time (PAOT) within a pennit boundary of 3,458 acres.

The permittee's 1988 application for a new Master Plan proposed that the ski area expand to accommodate approximately 15,000 to 17,500 skiers per day within an expanded pennit area. The application states that existing facilities and terrain at the Main Lodge and Hood River Meadows base areas are insufficient to meet skiing demand or to accommodate significant expansion of the mountain facilities. The development of publicly available, overnight accommodations was proposed to improve the quality and variety of mountain and base area facilities through increased midweek utilization and year-round recreational opportunities.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on the proposal was completed and released for public review in February, 1989. In response to public comment, additional analysis was undertaken and the number of alternatives reduced for the FEIS. The FEIS was completed in December 1990 and a second, optional comment period of 30 days provided.

In May 1991, the Mt. Hood National Forest Supervisor issued a Record of Decision (ROD) that would have authorized a new 15-20 year Master Plan to replace the 1978 Master Plan. The new master plan would have included:

- Conversion from a day-use ski area to a full-season regional destination resort with a maximum

capacity of 15,000 PAOT;

- Construction of 500 units of housing in phases of no more than 250 units;
- Expansion of the pennit area by 700 acres to provide downhill skiing in the White River area;
- Replacement of some existing lifts with higher capacity lifts and construction of five new lifts;
- Construction and year-round operation of a mid-mountain restaurant; and
- Expansion of the pennit area by 96 acres for additional groomed nordic skiing in the Hood River Meadows area.

The ROD was appealed to the Forest Service Regional Forester by a consortium of 12 environmental organizations and by several individuals. In November 1991, the Regional Forester reversed the Forest Supervisor's decision and directed that additional cultural resource analysis be conducted. Specifically, the Regional Forester indicated that additional information was needed on the impacts of ski area expansion on American Indian traditional use activities in the area.

In May 1995, MHM fonnally withdrew its request for conceptual approval of facilities used exclusively for overnight accommodations and requested that the MHNH reinitiate the environmental review process for a revised conceptual Master Plan proposal.

In response to the revised proposal, the MHNH prepared and released for public review a draft Supplement (DSEIS) to the 1990 Final Environmental Impact Statement in June 1996. Following public and agency review, a final Supplemental EIS (FSEIS) for the Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Area Master Plan!Access Road has been prepared and is issued concurrently with this Decision. The FSEIS is the basis for the authorization of a new Master Development Plan in this ROD and a separate decision by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on access road improvements.

A Supplemental EIS was prepared in order to analyze a range of alternatives that did not include overnight housing, to incorporate new information collected since the 1991 Decision (reversed), and to evaluate compliance with the Northwest Forest Plan. As a supplement, the SEIS augments rather than replaces the 1990 FEIS. It provides information concerning the environment affected by, and potential environmental effects of, Master Plan alternatives which is supplemental to that provided in the 1990

B. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Considerable efforts were made during the preparation of the 1990 EIS to solicit input from interested and affected agencies, organizations, other entities and individuals. The response was significant, with almost 2,700 letters, postcards and other forms of comment on the DEIS and 474 letters commenting on the PEIS.

Input on the DSEIS was solicited through a February, 1996 project update, public open house, press releases, newspaper articles and legal advertisement in the Hood River newspaper. Almost 700 copies of the DSEIS were distributed.

During a 45-day public comment period on the DSEIS, almost 280 responses were received. (see FSEIS, Section ill, for the agency's response to these comments.) The majority of the public input received represented the different ends of the opinion spectrum, with an almost equal number of respondents either

supporting MHM's proposed action (Alternative S5) or opposing any additional ski area development and expanded summer uses. At least 40% of the responses were form or modified form letters.

Consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (CTWS) has been ongoing since initiation of the NEPA process. Since reversal of the 1991 ROD, consultation has addressed the scope of an ethnographic study of the area, eligibility of the White River headwaters to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), potential mitigation of Tribal concerns with proposed ski area expansion, MHM's withdrawal of its request for conceptual approval of overnight lodging accommodations, and additional Master Plan development authorized under the 1978 FEIS.

The Western Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) participated in the SEIS process as a Cooperating Agency, including participation on the project's Interdisciplinary Team.

Consultation has also occurred with the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and conferencing with the National Marine Fisheries Service (see Section V).

The State Historic Preservation Office has been consulted on effects determinations for resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Consultation with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), Region I, has been ongoing to develop mitigation for potential traffic impacts to US Highway 26 and OR Highway 35. Consultation with the Governor's office has also focused on potential mitigation of Highway 26 traffic impacts associated with the proposed MHM expansion.

II. DECISION

A. SCOPE OF DECISION

This Record of Decision (ROD) was developed according to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and states my decision, as Forest Supervisor, in regard to a new Master Plan for the MHM Ski Area and my recommendation to the Federal Highway Administration for site-specific improvements to Oregon Highway 35 and to the MHM access road (Forest Road 3555). In addition, it includes the requirements which are a part of my decision, the factors that were considered, and the recourse the public has to appeal.

This is a programmatic decision and minor amendment of the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, providing conceptual direction for future development at MHM. It establishes the Desired Future Condition but authorizes no facilities or uses.

Forest Service regulations provide for systematic stepping down from the overall direction provided in the Forest Plan when making project or activity level decisions. The Forest Service Planning Handbook provides:

Planning for units of the National Forest System involves two levels of decisions. The first is the development of a Forest Plan that provides direction for all resource management programs, practices, uses, and protection measures.... The second level planning involves the analysis and

implementation of management practices designed to achieve the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. This level involves site-specific analysis to meet NEPA requirements for decision making. FSM 1922,53 Fed. Reg. 26807, 267809 (July 15, 1988).

The elements, or scope, of my decision are outlined below, followed by more detailed explanations of these various elements and the conditions for their implementation. Section III explains the rationale for my decision and recommendations.

1. Non-Significant Amendment to Forest Plan .

I am authorized as Forest Supervisor to implement amendments to the Forest Plan to respond to changing needs and opportunities, information identified during project analysis, or monitoring and evaluation of the Forest Plan. In accordance with the requirements of 36 CFR 219.10(e) and (f), FSM 1922.51 and 1922.52 and 1909.12, 5.32, I am authorizing a non-significant amendment (Amendment No. 10) to the Forest Plan. This amendment:

- a. Authorizes a new long-term (10-20 years), conceptual Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Area Master Plan to replace the current Master Plan authorized by a 1978 FEIS and to define the Desired Future Condition for an expanded permit area.
- b. Amends the land allocation for a 96-acre permit area expansion from B-9. Wildlife Visual Area, to A-II, Winter Recreation; and amends the identification of Matrix land for this area to an Administratively Withdrawn land allocation.
- c. Amends the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) for the permit area from Partial Retention to Modification in the foreground as viewed from the Timberline and Umbrella Falls trails.
- d. Amends Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes for the expanded permit area.

2. Amendments to Special Use Permit

I am amending the special use permit issued to MHM in December 1992 to:

- a. Expand the permit area by 96 acres to the east of the Hood River Meadows base between the current permit boundary and Clark Creek.
- b. Establish authorized summer uses.

3. Recommended Road Improvements

I am recommending approval by the Western Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) of site-specific improvements to Oregon Highway 35 and the access road to MHM (Forest Road 3555) as identified in Alternative R4 in the SEIS.

I am also recommending that mitigation identified as applicable to Alternative R4 in the FSEIS be adopted by FHWA as part of its ROD.

Based upon FHWA authorization of Alternative R4, my decision:

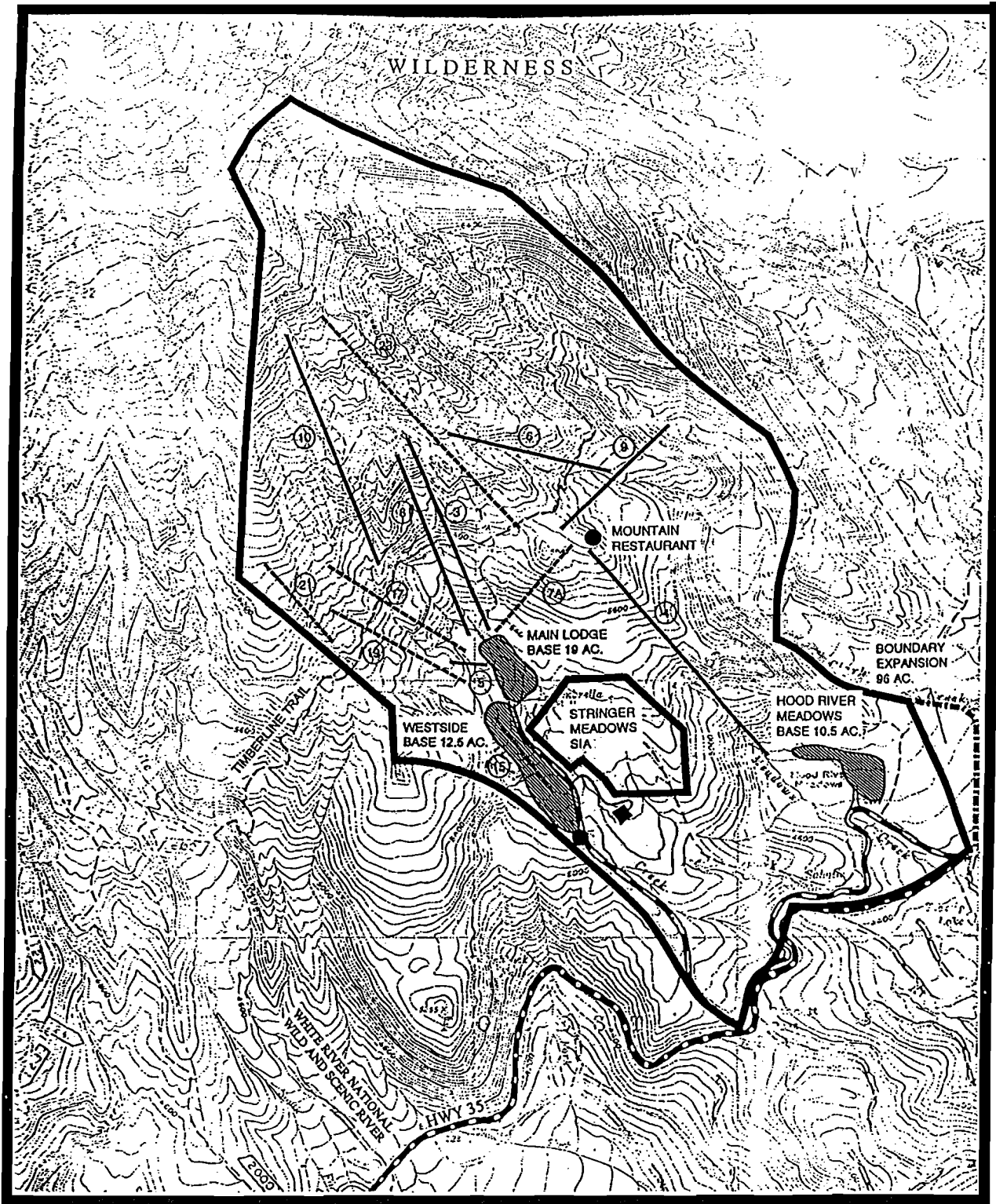
- a. Designates Mud Creek pit as the aggregate source and the Robinhood quarry and White River pit as disposal sites for excess materials associated with the authorized road improvements. Use of the Robinhood quarry is contingent upon my approval of a site rehabilitation plan.
- b. Consents to an easement across National Forest System Lands for reconstruction of OR Highway 35.

B. AUTHORIZED MASTER PLAN

I have read the 1990 FEIS and the 1996 Draft and Final SEIS for the MHM Ski Area Master Plan and I understand the environmental effects that they disclose. After consideration of the EIS analysis, applicable laws, public comments, and response to comments, I have decided to select Alternative S4, the agency's Preferred Alternative as identified in the SEIS, with minor modifications, as the new Master Plan for MHM. The modifications to Alternative S4 are explained in the descriptions of authorized Master Plan elements below. Approval of a new Master Plan represents a minor amendment of the Mt. Hood Forest Plan (Amendment No. 10). Specifically, the authorized Master Plan:

- Defines the Desired Future Condition for an expanded permit area.
- Provides general direction for future development at MHM. This approval does NOT authorize specific facilities or uses, define the exact location of facilities, nor stipulate a timeline for development. Rather, it conceptually approves the number and approximate locations of lifts, additional ski terrain, base area expansions, other winter facilities and USEs, access and service roads, and summer uses. Implementation will require additional site-specific environmental analysis pursuant to NEPA requirements. Future NEPA analysis will be tiered to this Decision and the Final SEIS and the public will have the opportunity to participate.
- Establishes winter sports design capacities and summer use maximum capacities.

A summary and detailed description of authorized Master Plan elements follows.



LEGEND

BASE AREAS



OLLIER FACILITIES

- Existing
- Proposed

PERMIT BOUNDARY

- Existing
- Proposed

LIFTS (10)

- Existing
- Proposed

ACCESS

- State Highway
- Access Road
- Trails

AUTHORIZED MASTER PLAN

**MT. HOOD MEADOWS SKI AREA
MASTER PLAN SEIS**

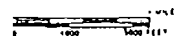
DECEMBER 1996

Concept

FF (10)


*200.02
.03*

Boundaries and facility locations are approximate.
Due to base map limitations 8 portion of the Hood River Meadows boundary expansion is not depicted





LEGEND

 SPNM (Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized)

 RONA (Road-to-Nature)

 **RURAL**

AUTHORIZED SUMMER USE ROS CLASSES

MT. HOOD MEADOWS SKI AREA
MASTER PLAN SEIS

DECEMBER 1996

Boundaries and facility locations are approximate.

Due to base map limitations a portion of the Hood River Meadows boundary expansion is not depicted.

SCALE 1:24,000



1. SUMMARY OF AUTHORIZED ELEMENTS

	<u>Existing Situation</u>	<u>Authorized Master Plan</u>
Function:	Maintain MHM as a day-use ski area within the current pennit area, with limited summer uses	Maximize the skiing potential and expand summer uses within the existing pennit area
PAOT:	Winter: 8,600 Summer: 150-500	Winter: 13,900 (13,100 alpine, 800 nordic) Summer: 500 - 1,500
Lifts:	Winter: 10 chairlifts, 2 surface lifts Summer: 0	Winter: 13 chairlifts, 7 surface lifts Summer: 1 full-time lift, 1 part-time lift
Bases:	3 bases = 25.5 acres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13-acre Main Lodge base • 9.5-acre Hood River Meadows base • 3-acre Westside base (overflow parking area) 	3 bases = 42 acres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-acre Main Lodge base expansion • I-acre Hood River Meadows base expansion • 9.5-acre Westside base expansion
Support Facilities:	Comfort station Sewage treatment plant Water treatment building Maintenance area (Main Lodge base) 3.35 miles of access roads 4.75 miles of service roads	Mountain restaurant (Site A) Maintenance area (Westside base) Picnic areas Access Road A (0.50 mile) Service Roads A, F and G (0.30 mile)
Parking:	22.5 acres/2,930 vehicles	30.5 acres/4,600 vehicles
PemdtArea:	3,458 acres	3,554 acres <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96-acre expansion at Hood River Meadows

2. WINTER FUNCTION AND USES

Desired Future Condition

- Maximize the potential of an expanded pennit area as a day-use ski area.
- Target expansion of skier services to existing base areas to minimize adverse environmental impacts.
- Improve the balance of skiing terrain through new chair and surface lifts and additional terrain.
- Improve the quality of the recreational experience through expanded/upgraded facilities and

access road improvements.

- Expand nordic skiing opportunities.
- Limit the amount of parking authorized as a means to promote alternative transportation modes, to minimize the land area committed to development, and to respond to public and agency concerns about increased traffic congestion on US 26.

Winter Capacity

A design capacity of 13,900 PAOT (persons-at-one-time) is established for lifts, groomed ski trail, and skier service facilities. This PAOT capacity encompasses all users, including nordic skiers (800 PAOT) and non-skiers.

Main Lodge Base Expansion

The existing Main Lodge base is expanded by up to six acres to accommodate up to three acres of additional parking and three acres of additional skier services.

CONDITIONS

Stormwater management and snow storage are to be incorporated into the design of both the existing and additional parking. Vegetation disturbance and clearing to accommodate the expanded parking and skier services, stormwater management, and snow storage will be limited to a maximum of six acres.

Westside Base Expansion

The existing Westside base is expanded by up to 9.5 acres to accommodate up to five acres of additional parking, 1.5 acres of additional skier services, and three acres for new maintenance facilities.

Note: This acreage is a modification of the 6.5 acres cited in Alternative S4; three acres have been included for maintenance facilities to be incorporated as part of the base, rather than as a separate Master Plan element as identified in the SEIS.

CONDITIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The function of Riparian Reserves within the expanded base area is to be maintained through preservation of existing forested and riparian vegetation to the extent possible. Vegetation disturbance and clearing to accommodate the expanded parking and skier services, maintenance facilities, snow storage,

stonnwater management, and all other uses except Lift 15 and associated ski trails, will be limited to a maximum of 9.5 acres. To the extent feasible, existing clearings are to be utilized for ski trail development associated with Lift 15. To reduce the impacts of clearing, the width of these trail clearings is to be minimized.

The permittee has the flexibility to site the authorized development within the larger base area identified in the SEIS (excluding that portion within the White River drainage). Full development maybe constrained by topography, Riparian Reserves and other limitations.

I am recommending that MHM consider locating new maintenance facilities at the site of the existing administration building versus in the middle or lower portions of the expanded base area. This area offers several distinct advantages: it has previously been committed to development, provides easy access for grooming machines to ski slopes, and represents an opportunity to provide a small area for employee parking.

Hood River Meadows Base Expansion

The existing Hood River Meadows base is expanded by up to one acre to accommodate an alpine skiing day lodge.

CONDITIONS

The alpine skiing day lodge is to be located at the site of the current temporary facility at the north bulb parking turnaround and be designed to accommodate up to 2,500 PAOT.

Construction of the nordic lodge authorized in a 1994 Decision Notice will be part of the first phase of Master Plan development and occur prior to or simultaneous with construction of the new alpine lodge.

No additional parking is authorized in conjunction with the base area expansion. Adequate parking for nordic skiers, including during peak alpine skiing periods, will be dedicated and managed as part of the existing parking area.

Parking

A total of up to 8 acres of additional parking is authorized as part of the base area expansions. Stonnwater management and snow storage are included in, rather than in addition to, this total. Construction of this parking is to be phased, based upon an annual average background traffic growth rate of 2.6% on US Highway 26. The annual parking allocation may be accumulated (banked) to provide for a critical mass, rather than increments, of parking.

Based upon 30.5 acres of total parking (8 new acres, 20.5 existing acres), 0.8 acres of parking could be developed annually ($30.5 \text{ acres} \times 2.6\% = 0.8 \text{ acres}$).

CONDITIONS

Due to the environmental limitations of the sites authorized for parking expansion, the total parking design capacity is limited to a maximum of 8 acres. Using current vehicle occupancy figures, the 8 acres

would accommodate approximately 12,500 PAOT. To accommodate the 13,900 PAOT capacities allowed for other facilities, alternative forms of transportation will need to be utilized, i.e., increased car pooling, increased busing, mass transit. If adequate parking areas cannot be sited at the Main Lodge and Westside bases due to environmental and other constraints, future modification of the Master Plan may be considered to provide additional parking at the Hood River Meadows base.

Other mitigation to address MHM's contribution to US 26 traffic congestion will be applied as described in the Response to Significant Issues section and under Transportation mitigation (page A-16).

All parking areas will be paved; existing unpaved areas are to be paved prior to development of additional parking. Stormwater management and snow storage will be incorporated into both existing and new parking areas.

Overnight recreational vehicle (RV) parking in base area parking lots is authorized as an incidental use in the winter. During the summer and shoulder seasons, overnight parking may be authorized by the District Ranger in conjunction only with authorized special events.

Skier Facilities and Services

Specific skier facilities and services include:

- ◆ Thirteen (13) chairlifts, approximately located and sized in capacity as described for Alternative S4.
- In association with the authorized lifts, the creation or redevelopment of an additional 95 acres of ski terrain within the existing permit area. The expanded ski trail system would total approximately 825 acres.

Note: This reflects corrected acreages associated with ski trails for Lift 15.

- Seven surface lifts, as proposed in MHM's comments on the Draft SEIS, to be used primarily for ski school and chairlift access.

Note: This is a reduction from the 9 surface lifts assessed in Alternative S4.

- A maximum of six permanent racing facilities, with additional mobile facilities as authorized by the District Ranger.
- Night skiing in conjunction with all lifts, except Lifts 9 (Heather Canyon), 10 (Cascade Express) and 23 (Elevator Express)
- Management by MHM of 15 kilometers of groomed nordic trails within the expanded permit area at Hood River Meadows.
- A full-service restaurant with a capacity limited to 1,000 PAOT in the winter.

Note: This is a reduction from the 1,500 PAOT year-round capacity assessed in Alternative S4.

CONDITIONS

Additional site-specific analysis will be required to evaluate the effects of the authorized surface lifts and racing facilities upon functionality of ski trail system, to avoid visual clutter (Le., too many facilities within an area), and to identify other impacts to be addressed in their design and siting.

To enhance the skier experience and to aid in dispersing skiers away from base areas, a year-round restaurant is authorized on a one-acre site at the top of Lifts 7A (Yellow Express) and 4 (Hood River Meadows). A total building size of up to 12,500 square feet and a maximum building height of 35 feet are authorized, with the architectural style and colors to blend with the natural surroundings.

Adequate buffers are to be provided between MHM's nordic trails and adjacent Forest Service nordic trails to prevent conflicts among fee versus non-fee users.

Access/Service Road System

An expanded access/service road system is authorized as described for Alternative S4.

CONDITIONS

Access Road A is intended to be part of the public road system, as opposed to a private service road, connecting Westside base area elements. Road widths are to be kept to a minimum and construction practices closely monitored to protect environmental values and meet functional requirements.

3. SUMMER FUNCTION AND USES

Desired Future Condition

- Developed and dispersed summer recreational opportunities expanded through a limited increase in developed summer uses and continuation of existing dispersed uses.
- Summer uses to be concentrated within the Rural Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class, encompassing the Main Lodge base and mid-mountain areas, with limited uplifting, restaurant operations, picnic areas, and hiking as described for Alternative S4. The remainder of permit area to be managed as Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS class. Summer uses to be managed to avoid resource impacts through restrictions on access to areas with hardened surfaces or improved trails and through other appropriate measures established in a Summer Use Plan.

Note: The Roded Natural (RONA) ROS class proposed *in* Alternative S4 has been incorporated into Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.

Summer Capacity

A long-term maximum capacity of 1,500 PAOT is established for summer uses within the expanded permit area. Initially, the summer use capacity is limited to 500 PAOT. Quantifiable Limits of Acceptable Change (LACs), established in a Summer Use Plan, will be used as criteria for any increase beyond 500 PAOT.

Note: A phased approach is a modification to Alternative *S4*.

CONDITIONS/DISCUSSION

Unlike the winter capacity which is a design capacity, the summer use capacity is an enforceable maximum number of summer visitors to the permit area which includes all MHM-generated users (including group lodging users); other visitors to the area, e.g., Timberline Trail hikers, are not included. Administrative use is not considered summer use, and thus is not restrained by ROS classes. Late season skiing is also not considered a summer use.

As a prerequisite for any new or expanded summer uses, a Summer Use Plan will be prepared, financed by the permittee, and analyzed through the appropriate NEPA process. The Plan will utilize an LAC process to identify controls on access and to identify indicators and standards of acceptable social and resource conditions for summer uses. The LACs will identify limits for such things as encounters, noise levels, erosion and vegetation loss from summer users, and type, number, and condition of summer recreation facilities within the framework provided by each ROS class. Indicators identified in the LAC process for social, managerial, resource and experience conditions will be monitored.

Impacts associated with summer uses will be monitored to ensure LACs are met. MHM is expected to financially contribute to the cost of this monitoring. If monitoring indicates that LACs are being met, then additional uses and capacity beyond the 500 PAOT limitation may be authorized as appropriate. If LACs are not being met, an increase in capacity and additional uses will not be authorized and existing levels of summer uses may be decreased.

Summer Uses

- Summer uplifting full-time on Lift 7A (Yellow Express) and part-time on Lift 3 (Mt. Hood Express).
- Summer operation of the mid-mountain restaurant, with a maximum summer capacity of 150 PAOT in the initial phase of Summer Use Plan implementation. An increase in capacity may be authorized based upon monitoring of LACs and analysis through the appropriate NEPA process.
- Picnic areas at the Main Lodge base and in conjunction with uplifting. The picnic areas would be available for general public non-fee use, as well as reserved group use on a fee basis, and be managed and maintained by the permittee.

Note: This is a modification to eliminate picnic areas at the Westside base.

- Expansion of the existing hiking trail system by approximately three miles, as described for Alternative *S4*.
- The use of existing facilities for overnight lodging for ski camps (maximum capacity of 150 PAOT).

Note: The restriction to ski camps is a modification of Alternative *S4*.

CONDITIONS

The use of existing facilities for overnight lodging is available only for ski camps and is not to be made available to individuals, other groups or for public rental. It will be available only during off-peak times (May 1-November 1). Approval of a Summer Use Plan will be required as a pre-requisite to implementation. The Plan will include a program of activities for ski camp participants that shows planned activities and how ski camp participants will be managed when not skiing.

Noise levels associated with authorized summer uses will be monitored to ensure that they do not impact areas beyond the immediate vicinity of the Main Lodge base. Outside amplification will not be permitted.

I am specifically not authorizing dedicated mountain biking trails nor campground development within the permit area, or any developed recreation uses within the White River drainage. I recognize that the demand for mountain biking trails on the Forest has been steadily increasing, however I believe that there are adequate developed recreation facilities elsewhere on Mt. Hood and on state and county lands in Hood River County to meet this demand. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that it would be extremely difficult to regulate mountain biking to avoid adverse impacts to the sensitive alpine environment at MHM. Any **uplifting** of mountain bikes on the Timberline Trail would be an adverse effect on the Trail setting and likely result in conflicts among recreation users.

C. PERMIT AREA EXPANSION AND LAND USE ALLOCATIONS

1. Permit Area Expansion

In order to implement the authorized Master Plan, I am amending MHM's special use permit to expand the permit area boundary by 96 acres at Hood River Meadows. The permit expansion area is located north of the ODOT sand shed and between the current permit boundary and Clark Creek.

In conjunction with the permit area expansion, I am authorizing a non-significant Forest Plan amendment to change the Forest Plan allocation for the Hood River Meadows expansion area from B-9, Wildlife Nisual Area, to A-II, Winter Recreation. The Northwest Forest Plan allocation of Matrix land for this area is changed to an Administratively withdrawn land allocation.

DISCUSSION/CONDITIONS

Expansion of the permit area is intended to incorporate the approximately 15 kilometers of groomed nordic trails currently operated by MHM through its annual Operations Plan and avoid an annual permitting process. It also implements direction in the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act (16 USC 497b; FSM 2700-92-13) to include within the permit area "such acreage... sufficient and appropriate to accommodate the permittee's needs for ski operation and appropriate ancillary facilities."

No additional expansion in capacity beyond the authorized PAOT is associated with the permit area expansion and no developed summer uses are authorized in this area.

The authorized expansion of MHM's groomed track system provides wooded and varied terrain, which will enhance the present groomed track system and improve the quality of the nordic skiing experience

offered. In addition, the infrastructure is currently in place to support expanded nordic skiing, including a recently authorized nordic lodge at Hood River Meadows. To ensure timely integration of authorized nordic skiing opportunities into Master Plan implementation, construction of the nordic lodge authorized in a 1994 Decision Notice will precede construction of the alpine skiing day lodge authorized by this decision. Adequate parking for nordic skiers will also be dedicated at the Hood River Meadows base.

2. VQO Amendment

The pennit area's Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is amended from Partial Retention to Modification in the foreground, as viewed from the Timberline and Umbrella Falls trails, within the pennit area.

DISCUSSION

Forest Plan standards call for achievement of a Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of Partial Retention (PR) for the Timberline Trail within the MHM pennit area. The Trail has been identified as an historic cultural resource, eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This requires protection of its "setting", as well as the trail itself.

The overall existing VQO (cumulative effect rating) for the Timberline Trail as it crosses through the MHM pennit area is Modification. Implementation of the authorized Master Plan would introduce new facilities in the Trail's foreground that would further preclude the ability to meet current Forest Plan standards.

Nearly seven years of experience implementing the Forest Plan reveals consistent problems with scenic quality standards for developed winter recreation areas. Forest Plan VQOs were developed with a focus on the degree of alteration of natural landscapes on National Forests. Intensive ski area developments introduce urban scale facilities into an otherwise natural setting, particularly in base areas. In an urbanized setting, the perception of scenery shifts from the natural to the human-made. Our present Forest Plan standards do not focus on these elements or provide a basis for resolution of design issues for ski facilities.

The scenic quality of Partial Retention, applied unifonnly to all developed ski areas, is not achievable in some circumstances. The nature of ski facilities, particularly the high-tech materials and forms of modem lift towers and tenninals, makes them difficult to blend with natural fonn, line, color, and texture. These facilities will appear dominant inmost cases, no matter what mitigation measures are applied.

In recognition of the impracticality of meeting a Partial Retention VQO, I am specifically amending the VQO in the foreground as viewed from the Timberline and Umbrella Falls trails within the MHM pennit area. I am also recommending that evaluation of the need to amend VQO standards for winter recreation areas occur as part of the Forest Plan update, scheduled to begin in 1999.

3. ROS Classes

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes for the expanded pennit area are amended as proposed in Alternative S4.

DISCUSSION

The Forest Plan applies a Rural ROS class to the MHM permit area, except for the Stringer Meadows Special Interest Area, which is classified as Roded Natural. The existing ROS capacity would be higher (1,000-3,500 PAOT) under these Forest Plan classes than is currently experienced or authorized. In addition, the 1978 Master Plan restricts summer uses to the lower management levels currently experienced.

While MHM represents an opportunity to expand summer use opportunities to meet a growing regional demand, the permit area is also a high-elevation alpine and subalpine site with a short growing season, fragile soils and extreme weather conditions. During the winter months, the area is well protected with a deep snow cover and consequently, can withstand heavy use with only minor environmental impacts. However, in the summer after snowmelt, the area is much more susceptible to damage from overuse or concentrated use in specific areas. At this high elevation, once disturbed, vegetation takes a long *time* to heal. The original ski area Prospectus and both this EIS and the 1978 EIS conclude that the ability of the area to withstand significant summertime use is limited.

My decision directly responds to the area's limited ability to accommodate developed summer uses by concentrating these uses in a smaller area classified as Rural than is currently authorized in the Forest Plan.

4. Other Actions

Evaluation of the need to amend the Forest Plan allocation of A-II for that portion of the White River drainage to the *west* of the MHM permit area will occur as part of the Forest Plan update, scheduled to begin in 1999. The Forest Plan update process, rather than this Decision, is the appropriate vehicle to assess land allocation needs from a comprehensive, Forest-wide basis.

D. RECOMMENDED ACCESS ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

I am recommending that the Western Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) construct site-specific improvements to 0.7 mile of Oregon Highway 35 and 0.6 mile of the access road to MHM (Forest Road 3555), as detailed in Alternative R4 in the SEIS.

I am also recommending that mitigation identified as applicable to Alternative R4 in the FSEIS be adopted by FHWA as part of its ROD.

DISCUSSION

At FHWA's request, the Forest Service analyzed the impacts of these and alternative road improvements in the ski area SEIS, rather than through a separate environmental document. These improvements are intended to correct serious safety problems and to accommodate projected growth in traffic levels with proposed expansion of the ski area. Existing safety hazards related to icy conditions, steep grade, sharp curves, snow storage, and lack of adequate chain/unchain areas have resulted in a high number of accidents on this road. The number of accidents is much higher than on other high use forest roads. The SEIS provided site-specific (versus conceptual) analysis to serve as the total environmental analysis to be

conducted for the proposed road improvements. FHWA intends to adopt the SEIS and issue a separate Record of Decision that would constitute the official decision on proposed road improvements. FHWA's decision would be implemented in accordance with 23 CFR Part 771.

Forest Road 3555 is designated by FHWA as a forest highway eligible for funding under the Forest Highways Program. The Forest Highway Program is managed through the "tri-party" partnership of the Western Federal Lands Highway Division, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Forest Service. The purpose of the program is to provide safe and efficient transportation and public road access to and through the National Forest System Lands (NFSL) for visitors, recreationists, resource users, and others while promoting rural and community economic development and contributing to the achievement of ecosystem management objectives. The recommended improvements in the alignment, grade and surface of the lower portion of Forest Road 3555 and OR Highway 35 in the vicinity of its intersection with Forest Road 3555 are intended to meet this objective.

Forest Road 3555 is currently under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Upon completion of the road improvement project, the Forest Service will consent to FHWA issuing a highway easement to Hood River County.

A large portion of the excess materials from construction will be disposed of at the Robinhood quarry or the White River pit. Prior to use of the Robinhood quarry as a disposal site, I am requiring that a rehabilitation plan be developed and approved by the District Ranger. Plan requirements are delineated under Transportation mitigation measures (Appendix A). Rehabilitation of the White River pit will be pursued in accordance with the recent Decision. Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact (October 1996) issued by the Zigzag District Ranger.

E. REQUIRED MITIGATION AND MONITORING

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been incorporated into my decision or are addressed as required mitigation and monitoring measures. The mitigation measures and monitoring programs to be required for implementation of this Master Plan are listed in Appendix A to this ROD. These measures become terms and conditions of MHM's Special Use Permit. Additional measures may be considered at the time of development, based upon current conditions and technologies, success of prior measures, and other factors.

Required mitigation generally relates only to impacts on National Forest System Land and is based on legal authorities of the Forest Service. Local governments and state and federal agencies may require additional mitigation measures as conditions of permits. Any such measures are automatically incorporated as required measures. *Standards and guidelines and mitigation measures in the MHFL Forest Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan are also incorporated by reference as required measures.*

A key feature in the implementation of Master Plan mitigation measures will be the submittal by MHM of an annual Operations Plan for my approval. Forest Service staff will use the Operations Plan, which will include mitigation measures and monitoring provisions, to ensure that authorized Master Plan components are properly and correctly constructed, pursuant to conditions established in this Decision and other applicable federal requirements and regulations.

The initiation of new phases of Master Plan development after the initial phase will be contingent upon the satisfactory implementation of mitigation requirements for the previous phase and correction of any problems identified through project monitoring.

The Forest Service will also oversee implementation of road improvement mitigation measures that are assigned to FHWA. FHWA responsibility will be limited to those measures related to construction of roadway improvements; ongoing operation and maintenance will be the responsibility of the Forest Service and Hood River County.

A monitoring program will be developed as part of the site-specific environmental analysis required for each phase of development and implemented as soon as possible after approval of each phase to determine the effectiveness of mitigation measures. A number of monitoring measures are specified in the required mitigation. These include, but are not limited to, measures to monitor: activities within areas of geologic instability, revegetation and restoration of disturbed areas, water quality and Best Management Practices, cumulative visual effects, wilderness use, summer use LACs, traffic, and road improvement project effects.

Project areas will be monitored during and after Master Plan implementation to ensure that design features and mitigation measures are adequately and effectively implemented. This monitoring will provide important feedback concerning the effectiveness of standard operating practices and mitigation measures and the validity of analysis techniques. This information will be incorporated into future project planning efforts and will provide useful feedback for the ongoing Forest Planning process. If monitoring indicates that laws, regulations, standards or critical objectives are not being met, Master Plan elements and/or mitigation measures will be modified as necessary and appropriate.

In many cases, the responsibility for monitoring mitigation implementation will be shared among several agencies. In some cases, the initial responsibility will be shared, but ongoing monitoring will revert to the Forest Service. Monitoring support (either financial *and/or* operational) will be required of the permittee.

Due to concerns about the potential environmental impacts associated with the use of *salt* for summer skiing programs, the District Ranger has suspended its use until appropriate environmental analysis can be completed. I support that decision and direct that salt use for summer skiing remain suspended until adequate environmental analysis and an ongoing monitoring program have been completed; reviewed and approved by this office. Included in the analysis will be the establishment of minimum snow level requirements for summer skiing.

iii.. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

A. AUTHORITY

As Forest Supervisor, I am authorized to manage the MHNH in accordance with applicable laws and regulations set forth by Congressional legislation and Executive policy. The authority to make a decision on this proposal is found in the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986 (16 USC 497b), the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of June 12, 1960 (16 USC 528-531), and the National Forest

Management Act of 1976 (16 USC 1600-1614). The Ski Area Permit Act of 1986 authorizes me to issue long-term permits for the purposes of alpine skiing development. The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act states the policy that National Forests are established and shall be administered for recreation (and other) purposes. The National Forest Management Act provides for development of long range plans for forest management, and the Forest Plan was completed and implementation began in February 1991. NEPA requires a detailed statement on the proposed Master Plan and road improvements which has been provided in the 1990 FEIS and the 1996 SEIS.

Consideration has also been given to the following relevant laws, regulations, and direction: the Organic Administration Act of 1897; the Weeks Act of 1911; the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960; the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974; the Clean Air Act as amended; the Clean Water Act; Protection of Wetlands Executive Order 11990; the Safe Drinking Water Act; the Endangered Species Act; the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976; the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979; the Native American Religious Freedom Act; and the Pacific Northwest Region Record of Decision for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation, 1988. Furthermore, full considerations has been given to the effects disclosed in the SEIS and public comment received during the public involvement process. The decision, with the required mitigation measures, meets all applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The decision is also consistent with the purposes for which the Mt. Hood National Forest was established and is being administered. The authorized Master Plan is in the public interest.

B. GENERAL RATIONALE

The authorized Master Plan is intended to maximize the potential of the existing MHM special use permit area as a day-use ski area. This is a much different decision than that issued in 1991 and reversed on appeal by the Regional Forester. That decision would have authorized a regional full-season destination resort, with an overnight housing component, and expansion of the permit area by 700 acres in the White River drainage.

Since reversal of the 1991 ROD, a number of events have occurred that affect the development and authorization of a new Master Plan for MHM. Perhaps the most significant was the release of the Northwest Forest Plan (Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl) which amended the MHN Forest Plan and establishes new land allocations and standards and guidelines for resource management. Late-successional reserves, riparian areas, and key watersheds that are crucial to at-risk fish species and high quality water are afforded specific protection in the Northwest Forest Plan. All of these resources occur within the current permit area and/or the proposed White River expansion area.

In November 1994, a management plan was jointly prepared by the Forest and the Bureau of Land Management for the White River National Wild and Scenic River. The management plan specifically provides the option for ski area expansion into the White River drainage. All of the proposed White River expansion area would be included within the recommended Wild and Scenic River boundary. The plan's emphasis is on the maintenance and enhancement of those resource values which led to the river's designation as a Wild and Scenic River.

Since the 1990 FEIS, two ethnographic studies have been conducted that indicate that the existing permit area and proposed White River expansion area serve as an important traditional use area for members of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation.

In May 1995, MHM formally withdrew its request for **conceptual** approval of facilities used exclusively for overnight housing and requested approval of a Master Plan that would expand its role as a day-use, year-round resort within an expanded permit area.

The Master Plan that I am authorizing attempts to balance a growing regional demand for recreation opportunities with a management emphasis on resource protection. I believe that this decision also responds *to* public, agency and Tribal concerns about sensitive resources while ensuring that the MHM Ski Area continues to provide a high-quality skiing experience that is responsive to evolving customer preferences for outdoor recreation.

The authorized upgrading and expansion of existing facilities are intended to provide the quality and quantity of recreational opportunities envisioned and authorized by the Forest Plan for the permit area. By designating the permit area as a winter recreation area, the Forest Service has committed this portion of the National Forest System Lands (NFSL) to provide public recreational opportunities. The new Master Plan provides *the* vehicle to develop a range of services and facilities in both the short and long *terms* to serve existing and projected visitors, including downhill and nordic skiers and summer visitors.

I believe my Decision accomplishes the following important benefits:

- Responds to an anticipated increase in demand for developed recreational opportunities on *Mt. Hood* associated with a growing regional population through a carefully monitored and phased approach *to* additional winter and summer development at MHM.
- Provides *the* improvements and terrain expansion needed to ensure that the MHM Ski Area remains competitive in *the* regional skiing market and capable of providing quality winter and summer recreational experiences.
- Maximizes recreational opportunities while minimizing *the* impacts to sensitive and unique ecosystems by concentrating new and expanded uses and facilities within portions of the permit area previously committed *to* development.
- Improves the overall quality of the recreational experience through upgrading the level and quality of services and facilities.
- Expands summer uses to provide an increase in year-round recreational opportunities in an area allocated *to* developed winter recreation and available pursuant to Forest Plan direction for summer recreation.

Since initiating the environmental review for a new Master Plan in 1988, the proposed expansion of facilities, uses and the permit area at MHM has generated substantial interest and controversy. In making this decision, I have balanced management options, public comments, and the positive and negative impacts associated with each alternative. My decision reflects my desire to make MHM, an area dedicated to downhill skiing, the best possible ski area that it can be, while protecting the environmental

qualities that make it a unique place on Mt. Hood.

I have a great deal of concern about the potential adverse effects of this expansion to the area's environment and to the natural resources present in it. I have carefully considered many different opinions and values people have expressed to me about the area's uses and limits of acceptable change. I fully recognize that the MHM area is valued by many for its natural beauty and the quality of its natural resources. Authorized development may unavoidably affect these resources, but their values will not be lost. I believe that with further NEPA analysis, application of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, implementation and monitoring of the mitigation measures stipulated in this Decision, a commitment by MHM to be a caring steward of the land, and the use of common sense, potential adverse impacts can be avoided or minimized to acceptable levels. To correct adverse impacts from past actions and in response to public comments, I am requiring MHM to prepare a Restoration Plan for District Ranger approval. The Plan is to identify areas in need of restoration and actions to address the identified restoration needs.

My stewardship responsibility encompasses 1.1 million acres which comprise the MHNF. My mandate is to protect the natural resource values while facilitating and sustaining an array of multiple uses of the MHNF, including downhill skiing and other recreation. To do this, I consider people, economics and our natural environment. I value the forest, not only for its many natural components, such as air, soil, water, vegetation and wildlife, but as a collection of functions and systems such as watersheds, ecosystems, habitats and cultures. MHM is an area which has historically and will continue to be dedicated to winter recreation, specifically downhill skiing. Both this decision and previous actions authorizing ski area development represent conscious decisions to dedicate this area to a specific developed recreational activity. The amount of land dedicated to downhill skiing is an extremely small proportion of my stewardship responsibility and by concentrating developed recreation activities within a defined geographic area, I am able to more effectively manage the remainder of the MHNF for its other resource values.

Over the past 30 years, MHM has consistently grown to become the largest and most visited ski area on Mt. Hood. No doubt, its further expansion will cause changes and impacts to the localized environment. I have considered the potential environmental consequences and have concluded that the benefits of the action outweigh the unavoidable impacts remaining after the required mitigation is implemented. Net impacts are acceptable and the action is an appropriate use of National Forest multiple use lands and is consistent with the Forest Plan.

Factors which relate to my decision are discussed below. No single factor determined my decision. Rather, a wide variety of factors were considered and balanced in reaching a decision that offers the greatest benefit to the public. My response to these factors will be seen and understood differently among individuals, but I have made every effort to consider all viewpoints in meeting my responsibility as a public land manager.

C. RESPONSE TO PURPOSE AND NEED

An important factor in my decision-making is the response of the SEIS alternatives to the purpose and need for a new Master Plan for the MHM Ski Area. How the alternatives respond to each of the elements of the purpose and need is compared below followed by my conclusions on which alternative(s)

responds best.

- *Increase the downhill skiing capacity to meet projected skiing demand.*

An objective of the Forest Service is to provide a variety of recreational opportunities, including alpine skiing, so that the public may use and enjoy their National Forests. Metro's Region 2040 Concept Plan projects a population increase of 700,000 persons within the four-county metropolitan area over the next 20 years. The authorized Master Plan for the MHM Ski Area provides a vehicle by which the Forest Service can partially fulfill the need for additional day skiing on the Forest to serve the Portland metropolitan market. Since all of the available and suitable downhill ski terrain around Mt. Hood is located on National Forest System land, and Forest Policy is to expand existing ski areas before authorizing new ones, expansion at MHM represents an opportunity to respond to this increasing demand.

Alternative S1 would provide no increase in downhill skiing capacity and thus does not respond to the purpose and need. The marginal increase in capacity (15%) in Alternative S2 would also not adequately respond. Alternatives S3-S5 would provide for increases in capacity ranging from 45% to 77%. The capacity increases in these alternatives would satisfy a portion of the projected regional demand for alpine skiing and could be accommodated within the project area's skier carrying capacity.

- *Improve the balance of skiing terrain and maintain optimal skier densities.*

The current terrain imbalance (lack of beginner, high intermediate and advanced terrain; surplus of low intermediate and intermediate terrain) would be continued in Alternatives S1 and S2. The balance of ski terrain would be improved in Alternatives S3-S5. Beginner terrain in the White River area would provide beginner/teaching terrain in an area that would be separated from more advanced terrain, thus improving the quality of the experience for beginner skiers. Advanced intermediate terrain in the White River expansion area would help to disperse skiers away from Main Lodge base area trails. The combined balance of intermediate and high intermediate terrain would be closer to industry standards than in other alternatives.

Alternative S4 would maximize the use of available ski terrain within the MHM permit area. The terrain mix would be improved, meeting ideal ski industry skill balance standards for beginner, intermediate and expert skiers. The majority of the new ski trails to be created or redeveloped would be intermediate terrain, which represents the largest segment of MHM's skiing market. The additional terrain authorized maintains skier densities at acceptable levels throughout the permit area, thus maintaining the overall quality of the skiing experience.

One of MHM's strongest arguments for a White River expansion is that beginner terrain in the White River area would provide beginner/teaching terrain in an area separated from other skier traffic. While Alternative S4 does not authorize a White River expansion, it provides MHM adequate opportunities to redesign its existing terrain and to integrate the new terrain authorized to better segregate its beginner skier areas.

- *Improve the overall quality of the recreational experience through upgrading the level and quality of services and facilities and optimizing the year-round recreational potential of the permit area, consistent with Forest Service environmental and recreational policies and MHM's financial capabilities.*

Upgrading and expansion of existing facilities is needed to provide the quality and quantity of recreational activities envisioned and provided for by the Forest Plan at winter recreation areas. Alternative S1 would provide no expansion of existing facilities or services. The limited upgrading in Alternative S2 would not optimize the year-round potential of the area nor likely be adequate in the long term to respond to skier expectations of what constitutes a quality skiing experience. While the quantities of services and facilities within the existing permit area vary somewhat in Alternatives S3-S5, the types and quality are essentially the same and all three alternatives would provide adequate facilities and services to serve existing and projected visitors. The major difference would be the lift(s) and associated ski terrain provided by a White River permit area expansion in Alternatives S3 and S5.

- *Expand nordic skiing opportunities.*

MHM currently operates 40 kilometers of groomed nordic track, with 15 of these located outside the existing permit area and authorized through an annual permitting process. In Alternatives S1 and S2, there would be no change in this arrangement. As previously discussed (Section II.C.1), Alternatives S3-S5 would avoid an annual permitting process, implement direction in the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act, and thus better respond to the purpose and need element.

- *Expand summer uses to provide a variety of recreational opportunities in an area allocated to developed winter recreation and available pursuant to Forest Plan policy for summer recreation.*

The National Recreation Strategy, National Forest Ski Area Permit Act, and Forest Plan management direction for winter recreation areas encourage summertime use of ski area facilities "where that use is compatible with or enhances natural resource-based recreation opportunities, and does not require additional specialized facilities" (FSM 2343.1). The Forest Service needs to provide a spectrum of recreational opportunities on the Forest to meet growing recreational demand. The MHM permit area is one of the few places in the Pacific Northwest where easy access to the alpine and subalpine zone is provided by road and chairlift. MHM facilities have the ability to support a variety of summer recreational activities, thus relieving some of the recreational use pressure on other, more primitive portions of the Forest. MHM and surrounding areas already have a well established, dispersed recreation use pattern during the summer. The expectation is that summertime use will continue to increase in this general area of the MHNH even without additional development to attract more people due to population growth in the Portland metropolitan area, the increase in tourism on Mt. Hood, and the attractiveness of the area.

There would be no expansion of current summer uses nor increase in ROS capacities in Alternatives S1 and S2. Alternatives S3-S5 intensify summer uses at the Main Lodge and Westside bases and onto the upper mountain with uplifting, picnic areas and restaurant operations. Alternatives S3 and S5 would accommodate significantly higher capacities, more developed facilities, and a wider variety of facilities than in Alternative S4. In addition, Alternative S5 would extend summer uses into the White River drainage. A moderate level of summer uses would be accommodated within a limited portion of the existing permit area in Alternative S4 in response to the area's limited summer use carrying capacity.

- *Provide safe and efficient road access for current and future users*

Four road improvement alternatives in the SEIS assess the viability and impacts of site-specific improvements to OR Highway 35 and Forest Road 3555, including widening, realigning sharp curves and

providing snow storage and chain-up areas. The engineering designs developed for Alternatives R2-R4 conform to the current practices, policies, and standards of OnOT, FHWA, the Forest Service, and American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Alternative R4 reflects FHWA's preferred approach to address existing safety problems, irrespective of the ski area master plan selected. The access road improvement alternatives can be independently combined with any of the ski area master plan alternatives.

In Alternative R1, existing safety and geometry problems on the access road would be uncorrected and no increase in capacity to accommodate ski area growth would be provided. Even without ski area expansion, the southbound approach would be expected to operate at capacity during poor weather conditions in the long term.

In Alternative R2, overall, there would be minor improvements to safety and capacity. With poor weather factored in, the access road capacity would be exceeded if a PAOT of 12,500 or greater is authorized.

Safety and capacity on Forest Road 3555 would be significantly improved in Alternative R3. However, with or without ski area expansion, turning movement conflicts would be expected to increase due to the growth in through traffic on OR 35. The primary conflicts would be between the eastbound left-turn traffic to the ski area and westbound traffic and between the southbound left-turn traffic and the traffic on OR 35. With ski area expansion, the southbound approach at the existing intersection would be expected to exceed capacity during both AM and PM peak hours.

Alternative R4 would improve the traffic operating conditions, eliminate conflicting movements and provide safer right-turn movements. This alternative would eliminate conflicts between the main traffic movement (the eastbound left-turn traffic) and westbound through traffic, as well as between the southbound left-turn traffic and the eastbound through traffic. The proposed interchange would operate sufficiently from a capacity standpoint under all ski area master plan alternatives.

Because it would reduce the potential number of conflicts, Alternative R4 would improve safety more than would Alternatives R1-R3. The proposed improvements to the access road would be expected to reduce potential accidents near the proposed interchange. It is expected that by improving the two sharp curves on the access road and increasing the design speed on the improved curves, drivers would have to slow suddenly, therefore accidents associated with the sudden speed change could be reduced. Also at the proposed interchange, heavy outbound traffic would be able to turn right without having to make a stop, reducing the potential for rear end accidents.

CONCLUSION

Based upon my review of the SEIS and the summary comparison above, it is my conclusion that Alternative S1 does not respond to the project's purpose and need. While Alternative S2 would partially respond to the purpose and need, it would not provide the same level of benefits (meet the project's needs) that would be obtained by implementing Alternatives S3-S5. Consequently, I do not feel that I would be justified in selecting either Alternative S1 or S2 as the ski area Master Plan. Alternatives S3, S4 and S5 all better respond to the purpose and need, albeit to varying degrees.

My recommendation of Alternative R4 to the FHWA, is based upon my determination that Alternatives

R1, R2 and R3 do not adequately address current and future safety problems on the access road and at its intersection with OR Highway 35. R4 is also the alternative most capable of accommodating the ski area capacity increases represented by Alternatives S3-S5.

D. RESPONSE TO SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Another key factor in my selection of a Master Plan alternative is its response to the significant issues identified in the SEIS. Given that Alternatives S1 and S2 do not satisfactorily respond to the purpose and need, I have focused my assessment of the response to significant issues on Alternatives S3-S5.

- *Increases in peak hour traffic on US Highway 26*

I recognize that any increase in capacity (PAOT) and parking for the MHM permit area will likely result in additional traffic congestion on US Highway 26 during both morning and afternoon peak periods in the winter and during inclement weather. The increase in summer capacity is limited and is not likely to significantly affect traffic congestion on US Highway 26 during afternoon peak hours on summer weekends.

The amount of parking authorized is the single greatest contributor to an increase in traffic congestion. Alternatives S3-S5 are all designed to mitigate MHM's potential contribution to peak hour congestion on Highway 26 in four key ways:

- In calculating parking needs, transit ridership of 25 % is assumed;
- The parking acreage proposed is less than that needed to accommodate the projected ski area capacity needs (even after the transit assumption is factored in);
- Parking would be developed in phased increments, based upon the annual background traffic growth rate on US 26 (2.6%); and
- Incentives employed by MHM, e.g., price incentives for off-peak skiing and promotional packages that combine lift tickets and bus transportation.

Given the size of the parking deficit in comparison to the PAOT increase in Alternative S4, I believe that it better mitigates MHM's contribution to peak hour traffic on US 26 than would Alternatives S3 and S5. The amount of parking provided in Alternative S4 would increase by 8 acres (36 percent) to a total of 30.5 acres. Based on SEIS calculations, the parking acreage needed to accommodate a PAOT of 13,900, however, would be 34.1 acres, a 63 percent increase. That is, adequate parking for a PAOT of only 12,500 is being provided as an incentive to promote alternative transportation modes and to minimize the land area committed to development. Over the long term, minor changes in average vehicle occupancy ratios, arrival/departure times, and mass transit percentages can accommodate an expansion to the total authorized PAOT of 13,900.

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has reviewed the DSEIS and commented that the mitigation strategy proposed to address MHM's contribution to US 26 traffic congestion seems reasonable and implementable.

In cooperation with ODOT, a traffic monitoring program will be maintained at MHM to be able to determine the effectiveness of traffic mitigation measures and the correlation of ski area usage to the total

traffic volume. The Forest will also continue to work cooperatively with ODOT in the development of the Mt. Hood Corridor (US 26) Environmental Impact Statement and the Hood River-Mt. Hood Summit (OR 35) Corridor Plan. Both of these efforts promote the use of OR 35 as an alternative to Highway 26 for access to MHM.

Since completion of the DSEIS, the State of Oregon, through the Governor's Office, has developed a state-wide initiative called the Oregon Transportation Initiative (OTI). In making this decision, I have considered this Initiative and recognize that the Governor's office has concerns with my authorizing additional parking at MHM. Instead, the State requests that the MHNF work cooperatively with ODOT and Mt. Hood ski areas to develop alternative transportation options.

I support the State's goal of not increasing winter peak period congestion (7:30-9:30 am and 3:30-5:30 pm) on Highway 26, and I understand funds are not likely to be available to make significant capacity improvements on the Mt. Hood portion of the highway for the next 10-15 years. Therefore, I am committed to working with the State and the Mt. Hood ski areas to cooperatively develop mitigation to address this issue. To help accomplish this, I am requiring that, in addition to the measures described above, a mitigation plan to address peak period traffic congestion from the MHM Ski Area be developed by MHM in cooperation with ODOT, prior to the approval of any additional parking at MHM. I do not believe, however, that at this conceptual stage denying an increase in parking to serve an increased capacity at MHM is a realistic solution to mitigate the Highway 26 congestion problem. The shortcomings of this strategy include:

- The authorized Master Plan would be rendered unimplementable for all practical purposes.
- Absent additional designated parking, skiers would be expected to park on access road shoulders at peak periods, creating safety hazards and congestion problems.
- Application of this parking limitation to MHM ignores the contribution of Mt. Bachelor, Kah-Nee-Ta, Central Oregon resorts and state parks, other Mt. Hood ski areas, and other developments to the traffic on Highway 26.
- The role of OR Highway 35 as an alternative route to MHM is not considered.
- The Supreme Court in Robertson v. Methow-Valley (109 S.Ct. at 1848), a case presenting circumstances very similar to the MHM Ski Area Master Plan! Access Road EIS, limits the ability of this agency to mitigate off-site impacts:

In this case, the off-site effects cannot be mitigated unless nonfederal government agencies take appropriate action. Since it is those state and local governmental bodies that have jurisdiction over the area in which the adverse effects need to be addressed and since they have the authority to mitigate them, it would be incongruous to conclude that the Forest Service has no power to act until the local agencies have reached a final conclusion on what mitigating measures they consider necessary. Even more significantly, it would be inconsistent with NEPA's reliance on procedural mechanisms -- as opposed to substantive, result-based standards -- to demand the presence of a fully developed plan that will mitigate environmental harm before an agency can act.

In addition to these measures targeted to Highway 26 congestion, the proposed access road improvements recommended to the FHWA represent an effort to address traffic safety and congestion issues on Highway 35 in the vicinity of the permit area.

- *Impacts to sensitive ecosystems, including Late-Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserves.*

For purposes for this discussion, I have combined the SEIS issues related to impacts to habitat of late-successional species and to sensitive ecosystems into one issue. Certain impacts to both of these resources would result from common activities in Alternatives S3-S5, most notably Westside base expansion. However, Alternative S5 would clearly have the greatest impacts to both the White River Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) and Riparian Reserves. The greatest amount of clearing would occur in Alternative S5 and approximately 100-140 acres within the 34,500-acre LSR would be directly or indirectly impacted. A site-specific LSR analysis conducted as supporting documentation for the SEIS indicates that certain impacts to the LSR would be unavoidable in Alternative S5, including fragmentation, loss of connectivity for smaller home range late seral species, and loss of potential *Calamagrostis brewerii* habitat. Implementation of Alternatives S3 and S5 may result in a trend to federal listing or loss of viability of *Calamagrostis brewerii* "var *breweri*." Moderate to high levels of summer use impacts on sensitive ecosystems would be expected in Alternative S3, and to a greater degree in Alternative S5.

Impacts to habitat of late-successional species within the White River LSR would be avoided in Alternative S4, as there would be no expansion of the permit area into the White River watershed. Alternative S4 best recognizes the values associated with maintaining the largest unfragmented block of old growth within the White River LSR. At a landscape level, this old growth block provides connectivity and refuge for late seral species around the south side of Mt. Hood. According to the LSR Assessment, this landscape is one of the most resilient blocks and one of the highest functional connectivity blocks within the LSR. Impacts to other sensitive ecosystems would also be largely avoided in Alternative S4; thus Alternative S4 would better respond to this issue than would Alternatives S3 and S5.

Issue: *Impacts to treaty reserved and other traditional uses of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, both in the White River drainage and within the existing permit area*

An important goal in my Decision is avoidance of impacts to treaty reserved and other traditional uses by the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (CTWS). I recognize the importance of Mt. Hood to CTWS for hunting, fishing, gathering berries and other plants, and spiritual beliefs. Under an 1855 Treaty, MHM is located on lands ceded to the US. We have consulted with the Tribes numerous times during the EIS preparation. I am committed to continuing this government-to-government communication to foster the continuation of Tribal uses of the mountain.

Effects to traditional uses and treaty rights are evaluated in Government to Government consultations with the CTWS. These consultations have resulted in official opposition by the Tribes to expansion into the White River drainage as proposed in Alternatives S3 and S5 and support for Alternative S4. The CTWS has consistently indicated that expansion into the White River drainage will create an adverse effect on traditional uses of the area and on the availability of Treaty resources. Ethnographic studies and past consultation with the Tribes indicate that while Native people continue to use the existing permit area, some of the traditional activities have been displaced into the White River area and others have been totally lost. Both of the ethnographic studies conducted since the 1990 FEIS indicated that the proposed expansion into the White River drainage appeared to have strong opposition from Tribal members due to concerns over loss of resources and spiritual integrity of the area. While there has been some coexistence between the traditional users of the area and the existence of the ski area, the evidence is that

the traditional uses and resources have been and will continue to be compromised by the presence of ski area development.

Issue: *Impacts to the historical setting of the Timberline Trail*

In Alternatives S3-S5, construction of chairlifts that cross the Trail, summer operation of lifts that cross the Trail, and the construction and summer operation of the mountain restaurant near the Trail have the potential to adversely affect the setting of the Timberline Trail, a cultural resource eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. The effect in Alternative S4 would be less than that in Alternatives S3 and S5 due to a lack of Trail impacts in the White River drainage and a reduced level of summer uses.

Implementation of any projects potentially affecting the Trail's setting will require additional site-specific environmental analysis. The actual effect to the Trail from these projects will be dependent on the site-specific design and, thus, a determination of effect will not be made until the site-specific proposals have been analyzed. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office will occur as part of the site-specific environmental analyses.

The State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation were provided with copies of the SEIS and Master Plan as part of the NEPA process. No comments have been received.

CONCLUSION

Based on my review of the SEIS and the summary comparison of the significant issues above, it is my conclusion that Alternative S4 better responds to the significant issues than would Alternatives S3 and S5. Alternative S4 is the alternative that responds best to both the significant issues and the purpose and need.

E. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Several additional considerations were important in my selection of the authorized Master Plan.

1. White River Expansion

A key consideration in my selection of a new Master Plan is the issue of expansion of the permit area into the White River drainage. With the withdrawal by MHM of its request for approval of a destination resort with overnight housing, this has also been the single most controversial aspect of the proposed Master Plan.

Expansion of the permit area westward into the White River drainage was analyzed but not authorized by the 1978 EIS, based upon findings that the approved PAOT (8,600) could be met within the existing permit area and the presence of potential conflicts with nordic skiers and Timberline Trail users. Since that time, the White River has been designated as a Wild and Scenic River by the Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1988: which specifically gives me discretion to approve construction and operation of ski facilities within the Wild and Scenic River boundary, insofar as they do not involve water resource projects and are consistent with protection of the river's recreational values. The Forest Plan has designated about 1,000 acres adjacent to the existing ski area boundary as Winter Recreation. This designation would permit downhill skiing and other winter sports in the area.

In its proposed Master Plan, MHM included a 700-acre expansion with two lifts, associated ski trails and service roads, and a portion of an expanded Westside base within the White River drainage. In its comments on the Draft SEIS, MHM presented several optional White River development scenarios designed to avoid direct impacts to Riparian Reserves and the White River LSR. Supporters of MHM's proposed Master Plan argued that not authorizing a White River expansion would not meet the project's purpose and need nor Forest Plan management direction.

I acknowledge that MHM's proposal to eliminate Lift 26 and relocate Lift 22 would likely avoid direct LSR and Riparian Reserve impacts. However, there are a number of critical management concerns that remain with any expansion of developed recreation facilities in the White River drainage. These include:

- + Fragmentation of undisturbed mature forest habitat, resulting in reduced habitat effectiveness, disruption to habitat corridors, and potential impacts to species dependent upon blocks of unfragmented older forests.
- Indirect and cumulative effects from increased human activities upon the adjacent LSR, Riparian Reserves, and sensitive plant species. Proposed facilities and uses could result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability of *Calamagrostis breweri*, a sensitive species.
- + The difficulty in meeting Aquatic Conservation Objectives (ACS) established by the Northwest Forest Plan. Even if location of facilities outside Riparian Reserves was determined to be feasible, the topography of the area would likely necessitate stream crossings by ski runs and funnel runoff directly into waterways. The impacts of clearing and increased human presence could be expected to reduce the functionality of Riparian Reserves.
- While MHM's proposed relocation of Lift 22 would not directly cross the Timberline Trail, ski trails and increased human presence would adversely affect the historic character of a previously undisturbed segment of the Trail.
- Tribal concerns about effects on traditional uses and Treaty rights are not mitigated.
- + The existing permit area is capable of providing an adequate amount and mix of terrain for the lifts, ski trails and other facilities needed to accommodate the authorized PAOT. A quality recreational experience can be provided without the additional White River terrain.
- + Authorizing expansion into the White River drainage would justify a larger increase in PAOT. Additional parking to serve that increased PAOT would be extremely difficult to site. The resultant PAOT-parking imbalance would be such that the quality of the recreational experience could be expected to be adversely affected.

Cumulatively, these management concerns argue against a White River permit area expansion. Therefore, I believe that I can best respond to management direction; the purpose and need and significant issues identified in the SEIS; and to public, agency and Tribal concerns by limiting additional summer recreational development and uses to the existing permit area and winter recreational development and uses to a permit area expanded only in the Hood River Meadows area.

2. Socioeconomic Impacts

I view this decision as an opportunity to work with local governments to diversify their economies. MHM's expansion provides significant benefits in terms of employment, tourist spending, induced (spinoff) income, tax revenues and other economic effects. Both nationally and regionally, investment by ski areas has helped to trigger vigorous economic growth in the counties in which they are located.

The community of Hood River has developed a successful partnership with MHM to promote off-season visitation to Hood River to increase year-round use of existing summer tourist facilities. The Hood River County Chamber of Commerce, City of Hood River, Hood River County, State of Oregon, Regional Strategies, Port of Hood River, Hood River County Visitors Council, and over 20 small businesses, hotels and restaurants, have invested approximately \$300,000 in this partnership in the past two years.

As described in the FEIS analysis of skier demand, local ski areas may potentially lose varying amounts of their current market shares over time as MHM captures a larger share of the regional market. However, each of the Mt. Hood ski areas has its particular niche in the market and I do not expect them to be significantly impacted. Experience at other ski areas indicates that, as the number of skiers visiting the study area increases, establishment of additional businesses specializing in skier services can be expected. Some businesses in the study area may experience periods of reduced sales as a result of competitive pricing. These impacts are expected to be minor, short-term and typical to a highly-competitive industry, such as skiing.

A concern of many local residents is the impact of expansion at MHM on the quality of life in Hood River and Clackamas counties. Some people are concerned that the counties cannot adequately handle the anticipated future growth impacts to housing, schools, taxes and planning issues. Without question, the proposed development will bring certain economic and social changes, which to some will be adverse and unwanted and to others welcome and positive.

The SEIS analysis indicates that Hood River County service costs may exceed tax revenues, based upon full project buildout. While the effects on the overall budget will be very small, I also recognize that Clackamas County service costs will be unreimbursed in terms of property tax revenues. I anticipate that much of these service costs to both counties will be offset in the long run by increased business revenues stimulated by the MHM development.

The adequate provision of affordable employee housing is another concern. The EIS analysis indicates that there appears to be a sufficient supply of available, residentially-zoned lands within the study area to meet the projected demand for employee housing. However, it is unclear whether the market will provide sufficient amounts of affordable housing without governmental intervention and assistance. Finding rental housing in the study area is currently extremely difficult and causing problems for some local employers in retaining and attracting employees. Such housing shortages are currently endemic to most major recreational developments in the region. While the primary responsibility for providing adequate employee housing rests with MHM, I am committed to work with the counties to seek adequate housing for employees of this and other major projects on National Forest System lands . .

On balance, I believe that expansion of the ski area will have an overall beneficial effect on the social and economic environment in the study area. Development will be phased in incrementally over 10-20 years and, therefore, its effects, both positive and negative, will be manageable.

3. Economic Feasibility

I have reviewed the economic analysis for this project and a break-even financial feasibility analysis submitted by MHM to assure myself that the Master Plan to be authorized is economically feasible. MHM has operated the ski area successfully for 30 years and I have no reason to believe that it will undertake additional development that is not financially viable.

4. Coordination with Local Land Use Planning

Finally, I have considered the compatibility of my decision with the Statewide Planning Goals and the Comprehensive Plans for Hood River and Clackamas counties. Although land use actions on National Forest System lands are not subject to state and local planning requirements, I believe that it is extremely important to coordinate our actions with these plans. I am also committed to working with the counties to direct growth induced by this development to areas with available public services and appropriate zoning.

IV. ALTERNATIVES

A. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Five alternatives for conceptual development of the MHM Ski Area - four development alternatives and a No Action Alternative -- were analyzed in detail in the SEIS. This range of alternatives was designed to provide a variety of choices for further development of MHM either within the existing permit area or within an expanded permit area. Summer uses were identified by alternative according to Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class and carrying capacity for each class.

At the request of the FHWA, four road improvement alternatives were also analyzed in detail in the SEIS. The FHWA will issue a separate Record of Decision based upon the SEIS analysis; the alternatives will be summarized in that decision.

1. Alternative S1: No Action

As required by NEPA, a No Action Alternative was included as a benchmark against which other alternatives were compared. It also served as a vehicle for analyzing the effects of no future development within the permit area. Alternative S1 recognized MHM as a day-use ski area with 10 chairlifts and 2 surface lifts and three bases totalling approximately 25.5 acres within the current permit area of 3,458 acres. The PAOT capacity would remain at 8,600 skiers per day. Summer uses would continue to be primarily dispersed uses with limited use of restaurant facilities by drop-in visitors and for catered events. Except for about 100 acres of Rural lands encompassing the Main Lodge and Westside bases, the permit area would be managed for Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized recreation and summer uses would be limited to a capacity of 150-500 PAOT.

2. Alternative S2:

Alternative S2 would expand MHM as a day-use ski area within the current pennit area. The alpine skiing capacity would be increased to a PAOT of 10,000 through expansion of two of the three existing base areas. Summer uses would be maintained at current uses and levels and managed as described for Alternative S1.

3. Alternative S3:

In Alternative S3, MHM would continue to be operated primarily as a day-use ski area, with limited summer uses. Alpine skiing capacity would be increased to 12,500 PAOT through a combination of expansion of existing base areas and expansion of the pennit area westward into the White River watershed and to the east of the Hood River Meadows base. Five new chairlifts would be constructed and 185 acres of ski trails would be created or redeveloped.

Summer uses would be intensified at the Main Lodge and Westside bases and expanded onto the upper mountain with uplifting, picnic areas and restaurant operations. No new summer uses would be introduced into the White River watershed. A capacity of 1,000 - 2,500 PAOT would be established for both developed and dispersed summer uses.

The existing pennit area boundary would be expanded in two areas. A boundary expansion of approximately 96 acres would occur at Hood River Meadows to incorporate into the pennit area approximately 15 kilometers of groomed trails currently operated by MHM through its Annual Operations permit. A boundary expansion of approximately 370 acres on the east side of the White River watershed would be located within the White River National Wild and Scenic River management area but be designed to avoid the White River LSR.

4. Alternative S4: Selected Alternative

Alternative S4" was the Forest Service Preferred Alternative in both the Draft and Final SEIS. This alternative would maximize the potential of the existing pennit area as a day-use ski area. Winter use capacity would be increased to 13,900 PAOT through expansion of all three base areas. A moderate increase in summer uses would be accommodated around the Main Lodge and Westside base areas and at mid-mountain with limited uplifting, picnic areas and restaurant operations. The pennit boundary would be expanded by 96 acres to the east of the Hood River Meadows base. A capacity of 500 - 1,500 PAOT would be established for both developed and dispersed summer uses. No new winter or summer uses would be introduced into the White River watershed. Housing for group camps would be provided in existing day-use facilities.

5. Alternative S5:

Alternative 85 represented MHM's proposed action and would establish MHM as a year-round recreation area and expand its role as a day-use ski area. A PAOT of 15,210 alpine skiers and 800 nordic skiers would be accommodated through expansion of facilities within the current pennit area and by expansion of the permit area at Hood River Meadows and into the White River drainage.

Summer uses would be intensified at base areas and expanded onto the upper mountain with uplifting, picnic areas, and restaurant operations. Moderate levels of summer uses would occur within the remainder of the permit area (except for the Heather Canyon area) and within the White River permit expansion area. Housing for group camps would be provided within existing day-use facilities. A capacity of 1,500 - 4,500 PAOT would be established for both developed and dispersed summer uses.

Two boundary expansions would increase the total permit area to 4,254 acres -- a 96-acre expansion at Hood River Meadows and a 700-acre expansion into the White River drainage. Approximately 300 acres of the White River expansion area would occur within the White River LSR. Also, about 10-15 acres of the 88-acre Westside base analysis area would be within the LSR. The entire permit expansion area would be located within the boundary of the White River National Wild and Scenic River.

B. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

In accordance with CEQ regulations, I have considered all alternatives in this analysis and have determined that Alternative S4, as modified, would be environmentally preferable. The environmentally preferable alternative is defined by CEQ as the alternative that promotes national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA Section 101. Typically, this means the alternative that causes the least impact to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural and natural resources.

Of the alternatives analyzed, I believe that Alternative S4 best forwards NEPA's goals to attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment and to achieve a balance between population and resource use. I believe that this alternative establishes a level of Master Plan development which is environmentally and economically viable, meets the purpose and need for the proposed action as defined in the SEIS, is consistent with management direction, and responds to the significant issues identified during the analysis. Incorporated into my decision to select Alternative S4 are measures to restore areas in need of restoration and other mitigation, e.g., stormwater management plan, designed to improve the physical environment of the permit area. Additional winter and summer recreation opportunities are clearly needed to meet the growing demand for developed recreation on the Forest. The challenge is how to accommodate this need without compromising the area's resource values. Of the alternatives considered, Alternative S4 best balances NEPA's goals consistent with the agency's statutory mission and responsibilities.

V. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

A. NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT

Pursuant to 40 CFR 1502.20, this Master Plan tiers to the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan designates the existing permit area for Winter Recreation, A-II, with inclusions of B-7 and Riparian Reserves, and authorizes all of the selected Master Plan elements as permitted uses within this area. Proposed road improvements in Alternative R4 would also be an allowable action under Forest Plan management direction.

Based upon the consistency analysis provided in the SEIS and the 1990 FEIS (pg. IV-129), I have concluded that this decision is implementing direction in the Forest Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan and the White River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan. Specific consistency findings include:

- Authorized ski area Master Plan elements will not conflict with LSR objectives or adversely effect the function of the White River LSR.
- Given the small proportion (0.075 %) of the LSR affected and that the purpose of the proposed access road improvements is to address identified safety problems that cannot be resolved without vegetation disturbance, the clearing of approximately 25 acres within the White River LSR in Alternative R4 will not conflict with LSR objectives or adversely affect the function of the LSR. These conclusions are based upon a project-specific LSR assessment prepared as part of the SEIS.
- Although the expanded Main Lodge base will likely conflict with some Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives within the study area, on a watershed level, no conflicts with ACS objectives would be expected. The ACS stresses maintaining and restoring ecosystem health at watershed and landscape scales to protect habitat for fish and other riparian-dependent species and resources and restore habitat over broad landscapes as opposed to individual projects or small watersheds (Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan, page B-9).
- Implementation of Alternative R4 will not conflict with ACS objectives.
- The authorized Master Plan will fully conform with management direction for the White River National Wild and Scenic River.
- The White River National Wild and Scenic River Management Plan specifically exempts roads constructed within the MHM permit boundary and needed for ski area operations from its prohibition against additional road construction in Segment A. Road improvements in Alternative R4 will occur outside the MHM permit area boundary and could appear to conflict with Wild and Scenic River Management Plan direction. However, I find that the intent of this management direction is to prohibit the construction of new roads outside the permit area and not to inhibit the reconstruction of the existing access road.

Forest Plan direction is being amended in two areas: (1) a VQO amendment for the expanded permit area and (2) land allocations associated with the 96-acre permit area expansion. I have determined that the site-specific amendment to the Forest Plan is non-significant in terms of the implementation regulations of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (36 CFR 219.10(e) and (f)). The following factors were among those considered:

1. *Location and Size.* The area is localized and small in proportion to the Forest as a whole; 96 acres out of 1.1 million acres.
2. *Goals and Objectives.* Adoption of the amendment will eliminate regulated timber harvest in an area identified by the Forest Plan as open and available for timber production. Overall Forest Plan goals, objectives, standards and guidelines will not be significantly altered. The 96 acres to be added to the MHM permit boundary represents 2.5 percent of this 3,790-acre Wildlife-

Visual (B-9) area that encompasses a **portion** of the upper East Fork Hood River watershed. For the most part, this proposed land allocation change would be compatible with Forest Plan standards and guidelines for Wildlife/Visual Areas. Both the B-9 and A-II **allocations** encourage recreation use and visual quality. Potential conflicts in standards and **guidelines** include those related to developed summer uses and regulated timber harvest. Standards and guidelines for the B-9 allocation indicate that no new summer use developed recreation sites **should** be constructed (B9-006), whereas A-11 standards and guidelines indicate that developed **summer** recreation uses may occur consistent with other management direction (A11-014). **Currently**, no developed summer uses exist within the 96 acres, and my decision specifically restricts **their** establishment in this area. Permanent, versus annually authorized, groomed nordic ski trail uses would conflict with the B-9 management direction for regulated timber harvest. Amendment of the allocations for these 96 acres to A-11 and Administratively withdrawn will obviate these conflicts.

3. *Outputs.* The amendment does not significantly alter long-term relationships between the levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan. Currently, regulated timber harvest activities, including salvage operations, are programmed for the permit expansion area. The change in allocation to A-11 will remove it from the regulated timber harvest program. Removal of this 96 acres from the regulated timber base will be a reduction of 11 mbf/year (110 mbf/decade) in the programmed timber harvest. This will be a reduction of less than 0.002% of the annual programmed harvest level. Although regulated harvest is not an authorized management activity under the A-II allocation, vegetation management may be necessary to provide desirable conditions over the long term. Thus, some minor level of timber harvest would be likely to occur. The increase in nordic skiing terrain will help meet Forest Plan output targets for developed winter recreation.

B. NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

Two cultural resource sites eligible to the National Register of Historic Places have been identified in the permit area. These are the Timberline Trail and the Sahalie Falls Bridge. There will be no effect to the Sahalie Falls Bridge. Construction of lifts that cross the Timberline Trail, use of lifts that cross the Timberline Trail during the summer, and the construction and summer operation of the mountain restaurant near the trail have the potential to affect the setting of the Timberline Trail.

The construction of Lift 23 and the replacement Lifts 17 and 19 should have a "no adverse effect" on the setting of the Trail. The summer use of Lift 3 crossing the Timberline Trail has the potential to have an adverse effect on the Trail. The construction of the mountain restaurant also has the potential to have an adverse effect on the setting of the Timberline Trail, as it represents the addition of a new intrusive visual element. Additionally, the summer operation may add new intrusive noise and alter the social setting of the Trail.

Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation will occur as part of the project-specific analysis required prior to Master Plan implementation. Consultation for the road improvement alternatives has been completed, with a determination of No Effect. I find that the authorized ski area Master Plan and recommended access road improvements are consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

C. ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Based upon the Biological Evaluation prepared for the FSEIS, implementation of the authorized ski area Master Plan will have no effect on the Northern spotted owl, other threatened and endangered species, or designated critical habitat.

Based upon consultation with the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service on proposed access road improvements in Alternative R4, a "take" of a pair of Northern spotted owls within the White River LSR has been authorized. As a condition of this authorization, seasonal restrictions on activities within 0.25 mile of this pair were directed for the period between March 1 and September 30. Since the initial authorization, a waiver has been granted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (letter of December 23, 1996) for a portion of the seasonal restriction. Specifically, a waiver has been granted for the removal of two acres of nesting; roosting and foraging habitat within LSR 204 to allow for construction activities beginning July 15.

On August 9, 1996 the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) proposed that steelhead trout within certain areas of the lower Columbia River be listed as "Threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. The Hood River watershed is included in their proposal. Through a biological evaluation, it has been determined that the actions considered in this decision are not likely to jeopardize or threaten the viability of steelhead trout or habitat. This determination has been discussed with NMFS.

Based on the biological evaluations and consultations with USFWS and NMFS, I have determined that my decision will not jeopardize or threaten the viability of any listed or proposed species and is therefore consistent with the Endangered Species Act.

D. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

The approved Master Plan tiers to the Forest Plan, which incorporated the Pacific Northwest Region's FEIS for Maflaging Competing and Unwanted Vegetation. In implementing MasterPlan project activities, MHM will be required to comply with the ROD issued on December 8, 1988 and the mediated agreement of May 1989.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

This decision may be implemented no sooner than thirty (30) calendar days following publication by the EPA of the notice of availability of the FSEIS in the Federal Register (FSM 1909.15).

Each use and facility authorized as a Master Plan component will require additional environmental analysis prior to construction, with the appropriate level of analysis determined pursuant to NEPA and Forest Service requirements. Project level implementation will normally be authorized by the Hood River District Ranger.

I am requiring that additional site-specific planning and analysis be undertaken as part of Master Plan implementation. Planning and analysis required prior to Master Plan implementation includes, but is not limited to:

- Phased development program (site design) that reflects phased development over the life of the Master Plan and addresses the phased development of additional parking based upon an annual growth rate of 2.6%;
- Stormwater management plan which demonstrates how runoff will be transported from impervious surfaces, stored and released into receiving waters based on full buildout addressing both current and future sediment inputs from impervious surfaces;
- Restoration plan that identifies areas in need of restoration, actions to address the identified restoration needs, an implementation schedule, and a monitoring program to document the progress of the restoration actions;
- Architectural plan that proposes an architectural theme and style guidelines; and
- Summer use plan that utilizes the Limits of Acceptable Change process to identify limits for summer use impacts.

I am requiring that the baseline data collection-program begun in 1991 be maintained and utilized for future site-specific environmental analysis and monitoring. Additional hydrologic information will be obtained through the data collection program so that potential impacts can be quantified, avoided where possible, and appropriate mitigation developed to ensure protection of Water quality. This site-specific mitigation, coupled with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, Best Management Practices, and the mitigation required in this decision, will ensure compliance with federal and state water quality standards.

Additional planning required at each phase of development *includes*, but is not limited to: development of monitoring programs, erosion control plans and cultural resource surveys.

Implementation of this decision is contingent upon the permittee obtaining any needed permits from local, state and federal agencies, including:

- Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) permits for stormwater discharges and for expansion of sewage treatment facilities and -accommodation within authorized mass discharge limits, pursuant to state water quality and federal antidegradation standards.
- Water rights from the Oregon Department of Water Resources (WRD) adequate to meet potable and non-potable needs.

Prior to taking action on the road improvement project, the following additional environmental clearance requirements must be met by FHWA (if Alternative R4 is selected): 1) COE 404 permit and state Water Quality certification; state Fill and Removal Permit; and 2) NPDES permit.

VII. APPEAL RIGHTS

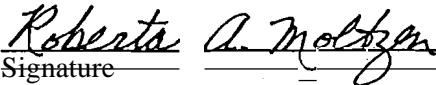
This decision may be appealed in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 217 by filing a written notice of appeal within 45 days of the date specified in the published legal notice. Two copies of the appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer:

Robert W. Williams, Regional Forester
Pacific Northwest Region
USDA Forest Service
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, Oregon 97208-3623

The notice of appeal must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (36 CFR 217.9).

Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in this document. Final decisions on facilities and uses conceptually authorized in this document will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation in compliance with NEPA.

For further information contact Kim Titus, District Ranger, or Ken Davis at the Hood River Ranger District at (541) 352-6002.


Signature

Roberta A. Moltzen
Forest Supervisor

JAN 24 1997

Date

RECORD OF DECISION
MT. HOOD MEADOWS SKI AREA MASTER PLAN/ACCESS ROAD
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

APPENDIX A
REQUIRED MITIGATION AND MONITORING

The mitigation measures to be required by the Forest Service for implementation of this Master Plan are listed below. A larger list of optional mitigation measures was included in the DSEIS, and by reference in the FSEIS, by resource area. Implementation of those measures in conjunction with these required measures will be considered at the time of development, based upon current conditions and technologies, success of prior measures, and other factors.

The mitigation measures listed here are limited to those for which the Forest Service has authority. Local governments and state and federal agencies may require additional mitigation measures as conditions of permits. Any such measures are automatically incorporated as required measures. *Standards and Guidelines and mitigation measures in the Forest Plan are also incorporated by reference as required measures.*

Assignments of responsibility would be as indicated in FSEIS Section II.D.

Monitoring and enforcement of required mitigation measures by the Forest Service will occur through the Annual Operating Permit and the Special Use Permit. A monitoring program will be developed as part of the environmental analysis required for each phase of development and implemented as soon as possible after approval of each phase to determine the effectiveness of mitigation measures.

The initiation of new phases of development after the initial phase will be contingent upon the satisfactory implementation of mitigation requirements for the current phase and correction of any problems identified through site-specific environmental analysis. Feedback mechanisms will be designed into the monitoring plans and mitigation measures. Feedback mechanisms use monitoring results to adjust Standards and Guidelines, Best Management Practices, standard operating procedures, intensity of monitoring, and permit administration when adverse effects are first detected. Providing such a process for adjustment will ensure that mitigation will improve in the future and that unforeseen adverse effects are recognized and minimized.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

In addition to the following, a number of the required mitigation measures listed below by resource topic are in reality standard operating procedures employed by the Forest Service pursuant to federal and state regulations and Forest Service Manual direction.

1. Environmental analysis will be conducted for all ground-disturbing activities. The level of analysis will be determined pursuant to NEPA and Forest Service standards and requirements.

2. A phased development plan will be submitted for Forest Service approval prior to implementation of any authorized Master Plan components. This Plan will detail specifically how and when development of authorized facilities will occur. The mitigation measures listed here will be made a part of the Plan. The Plan will be periodically updated to reflect changing conditions, technologies, policies and regulations.
3. The conduct of religious practices will be permitted without interference in compliance with the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. .
4. A monitoring program, which includes coordination with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and appropriate public agencies, will be developed as part of the environmental analysis required for each phase of development and implemented as soon as possible after approval of each phase to determine the effectiveness of mitigation measures.
5. All requirements and standards for protection of threatened, endangered and sensitive species will be met.
6. Requirements of the ROD and mediated agreement for the Northwest Region's FEIS for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation will be met.
7. Pursuant to the American Disabilities Act of 1991, new and remodeled facilities will be designed to meet the needs of the disabled to the extent practical.
8. All structures will be constructed to standards of the Uniform Building Code, National Plumbing Code, National Electric Code, and/or other recognized standards.
9. Forest Service requirements for service and access road grades will be met.
10. State and federal drinking water standards will be met.
11. The permittee will be required to financially contribute to the costs of additional Forest Service personnel needed to manage winter and summer recreation programs and to monitor compliance with required mitigation.

GEOLOGIC HAZARDS

1. Detailed, site-specific geotechnical investigations will be undertaken to identify whether any authorized facilities are subject to volcanic hazards, seismic hazards, glacial outburst floods or landslides prior to final structural project design and construction.
2. To minimize the impacts of natural hazards, steep slopes and attendant landslide erosion and drainage impacts will be avoided when possible in siting facilities and roads.
3. An emergency contingency plan for evacuation of the facility in case of volcanic or earthquake activity will be prepared.

4. Lift towers will be installed by helicopter where site-specific analysis indicates a high potential for instability. Pier foundations will be used where stable bedrock materials are within reach of foundations.
5. When possible and practical, a "floating" shallow foundation system will be used where lift alignments cross areas of existing instability.
6. Earth movement will be monitored within existing areas of instability to quantitatively establish direction of movement, rates of movement and seasonal fluctuations in rates.

AVALANCHE AND NATURAL HAZARDS

1. Detailed study of avalanche hazards will be undertaken to determine the safety of new lift, ski trail, service road, and facility locations.
2. Lift terminals, utilities and other facilities will be located outside of avalanche hazard zones to the extent possible.
3. Avalanche prevention and control measures will be included in the annual Operations Plan.
4. Potential natural hazards will be avoided in the siting of new ski trails, roads and facilities.
5. Stump removal will be authorized only on a project-by-project basis for safety or other management reasons.
6. Explosives will be stored in a location not readily accessible to the public, pursuant to State Fire Marshall requirements.

FIRE HAZARDS

1. Adequate water storage facilities will be provided, with appropriate environmental analysis required for the design and location of new facilities.
2. Forest Service burning permits will be obtained for all slash treatment.
3. Prior to Master Plan implementation, a fire prevention and suppression program will be prepared for inclusion in the annual Operations Plan.

AIROUALITY

1. Applicable Class I airshed standards for the Mt. Hood Wilderness and applicable Class II standards for the permit area will be met in accordance with Clean Air Act requirements.
2. Indirect Source Construction Permits will be obtained, as required, for expansion or construction of new parking areas and road improvements.

SOILS

1. Erosion control plans to reduce erosion and soil compaction will be submitted for District Ranger approval for each phase of construction, restoration and maintenance. If construction will take two or more years, interim erosion control methods will be identified. Proven BMPs and performance standards will be incorporated to determine whether the objectives for erosion control and revegetation are being met. A survey will be conducted to identify all areas that have less than acceptable vegetative cover and high surface compaction.
2. Cut and fill slopes will be stabilized by prompt revegetation and grading to an approved slope gradient (about 2: 1) or terracing where necessary to reduce the potential of long-term erosion and slope failures.
3. Special construction techniques will be employed when necessary to minimize compaction, erosion, sedimentation and other impacts. Based upon determination of the District Ranger, aerial or over-the-snow methods will be used for lift tower removal and construction and timber removal in areas with soils having severe erosion, compaction, or instability potential.
4. Auto and pedestrian traffic will be restricted in areas with high compaction hazards.
5. Land disturbances will be limited to areas to be developed. The acreage that would have to be reclaimed due to construction convenience will be minimized.
6. Operations and maintenance activities which disturb lands that have been recently revegetated or new areas that have been cleared will be avoided.
7. Prompt reclamation after disturbance will be required. Appropriate reclamation procedures, including ripping, mulching, seeding, or fertilizing, will be initiated to control erosion and enhance revegetation.
8. An aggressive visitor management program will be implemented to minimize compaction and displacement impacts around the mid-mountain restaurant and picnic areas.
9. Evaluation of soil displacement hazards at the Westside base will be conducted by a geotechnical engineer. Off-site soil impacts from construction of the Westside base will be minimized.
10. Service road surfaces will be erosion-proofed as determined necessary by the District Ranger.
11. Construction and grading will be scheduled to minimize soil exposure during periods of snowmelt and rainy periods.
12. Winter logging or helicopter logging will be required for timber removal from and through areas with sensitive soils and identified geologic hazards, wetlands and riparian habitats.
13. To minimize tree stump removal, trees will be flush cut to the extent feasible.

14. Cut and fill in road and facility construction will be minimized. Cut or fill slopes will be restricted to a 1.5:1 ratio, except as specifically authorized by the District Ranger.
15. Soil surface compaction and disturbance in riparian ecosystems will be minimized. The use of heavy construction equipment for construction, etc., will be restricted to periods when the soil is least susceptible to compaction or rutting.
16. Incorporation of slash or other organic materials into fills will be restricted, except for storage and replacement of topsoil.
17. Grading on slopes greater than 30% will be prohibited unless a site-specific prescription addressing soil stabilization and revegetation is approved by the District Ranger.

WATERSHED

Control of runoff will be required in conjunction with development in all alternatives, given the potential impacts upon water quality. A stormwater management plan which shows how runoff will be transported from impervious surfaces, stored, and released into receiving waters will be required as part of MHM's annual Operations Plan. This plan will be part of the permit application to the DEQ for authorization of stormwater discharges associated with construction activities.

1. Appropriate hydrologic analysis to assess potential water quality impacts will be conducted as part of the environmental analysis for site-specific development activities.
2. General Water Quality Best Management Practices (USDA 1988) will be implemented and routinely monitored to ensure compliance with requirements of Section 319 of the Clean Water Act and state water quality standards. Appropriate additional mitigation will be implemented if these BMPs are not adequate to ensure compliance with state standards. Effectiveness monitoring will be conducted at each new phase of development and at other appropriate times.
3. Project construction and maintenance activities will be avoided in particularly sensitive areas, areas which are consistently saturated or have perennially shallow water table conditions (Le., wetlands), and critical areas of groundwater recharge/discharge.
4. Significant changes to groundwater movement will be avoided.
5. To prevent increased runoff or flooding at other locations, reducing the natural capacity of watercourses will be avoided.
6. The effects of impervious surfaces on recharge, baseflow, low flows, peak flows and capacities of receiving streams will be assessed at each phase of development. Increasing peak flows to significant levels from runoff from impervious surface will be avoided.
7. Stormwater drainage and detention will be designed into all existing and new parking areas to collect heavy metals and oil and grease contaminants and to direct runoff away from sensitive areas.

8. The short and long-term impacts of salt used for both winter and summer skiing purposes will be monitored.
9. Culvert velocities will be evaluated and, where necessary, energy dissipation devices installed to reduce velocities.
10. The removal of any large areas of stream shade will be monitored to ensure conformance with OAR 340-41-525(2) water temperature standards.
11. Water quantity (streamflows) will be monitored before, during and after project implementation.
12. Water diversions and dissipators will be installed on all disturbed areas. Runoff from diversions will be directed away from sensitive areas into erosion-resistant locations, with retention sedimentation basins used as necessary.
13. Water diversions and retention-sedimentation basins that have failed or have been filled with sediment will be repaired, maintained or removed if determined to be no longer needed.
14. To avoid point source discharges, diffused discharge to surface waters will be emphasized to the greatest practical extent.
15. Ongoing water quality analysis will be conducted for the discharge of sewage effluent into the East Fork Hood River.
16. Consultation will occur ~~with~~ the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Water Resources Department, and other appropriate agencies to ensure that impacts to water quality and supply are fully assessed during the permitting processes for sewage treatment and water rights.
17. Adequate storage capacity will be provided for untreated wastewater in the event of sewage treatment plant failure.
18. Spill contingency plans, including procedures for notification, containment and cleanup, will be prepared for all activities where oil or potentially hazardous materials are used.
19. Maintenance facilities will be designed and constructed to ensure that contaminants do not enter the stream system.

VEGETATION

1. Clearing and construction practices that minimize surface disturbance and vegetation removal will be utilized.
2. Disturbance will be limited in alpine areas and wet subalpine meadows.
3. The use of native species for landscaping and reclamation will be encouraged wherever possible in an effort to re-establish native vegetation over time.

4. Dispersed trampling of plant communities will be avoided through construction of fonnal paths in heavy use areas and through other approved means.
5. Future timber removal in the permit area vicinity will be designed and scheduled to reduce the impacts to the area's recreational and visual values.
6. Impacts to R-6 Sensitive Plan populations and habitats from design and placement of structures and by machine activities will be avoided. Buffer zones for populations of *Calamagrostis brewerii* will be approved by the District Botanist on a site-specific project basis, with an average buffer of 200 feet from habitat edge. Sensitive plant populations will be monitored annually to evaluate population stability and to assess effects of ski area maintenance.
7. A vegetation management plan will be prepared for each phase of development that describes the treatment and prescriptions needed to perpetuate a healthy mixture of vegetation with a visually-pleasing mosaic pattern of vegetation types. Vegetation treatments will be detennined based on sound silvicultural prescriptions and be designed to avoid injury, decay or disease to remaining trees. Minimum snow depths will be established for both winter and summer skiing to protect vegetation from mechanical damage and salt effects (if salt use is authorized).
8. During construction, a vegetation protection plan approved by the District Ranger will be used that outlines specific measures safeguarding against accidental or unplanned destruction of vegetation. Leave trees, islands and tree clearing *limits* will be adequately marked to avoid mistakes in clearing limits during construction.
9. Prompt reclamation after disturbance will be required. To control erosion and enhance revegetation, appropriate reclamation procedures, including ripping, mulching, seeding andlor fertilizing, will be instituted according to an approved Erosion Control Plan. The use of native species for landscaping and reclamation will be encouraged whenever possible in an effort to re-establish native vegetation over time.
- to. Prior to Master Plan implementation, the permittee will prepare and submit for District Ranger approval a restoration plan that identifies: (a) areas in need of restoration; (b) actions to address the identified restoration needs; (c) an implementation schedule; and (d) a monitoring program to document the progress of the restoration actions.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN RESERVES

During the course of development, several small wetlands could be impacted, necessitating consultation andlor permitting by the Corps of Engineers. A no net loss policy will be adhered to in the case of direct wetland impacts. Riparian Reserves will be managed pursuant to Forest Plan standards and guidelines and Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) have established guidelines for evaluating and establishing appropriate mitigation for impacts to wetlands. These guidelines are documented in a 1990 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the agencies. In addition, EPA has developed infonnal guidelines regarding interpretation of the 1990 MOA. The

guidelines require the evaluation of appropriate mitigation to be considered in the following order: 1) avoidance, 2) minimization, and 3) compensation.

Section 230.10(a) of the Clean Water Act allows permit issuance for only the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. All non-water dependent activities must avoid adverse impacts to Waters of the United States to the fullest practicable extent. In addition, unavoidable adverse impacts must be minimized to the fullest practicable extent. Only after these two procedures have been employed is compensation considered. Appropriate and compensatory mitigation will be required for all unavoidable adverse impacts remaining after all practicable avoidance and minimization has occurred.

Compliance with Executive Orders 11988, Floodplain Management, and 11990 Protection of Wetlands will be required, using U.S. Water Resource Council Floodplain Management Guidelines 43 FR 6030, for any actions that could affect wetland resources.

1. Development will be avoided in wetland or riparian areas unless there are no alternatives available, as determined by the District Ranger. A detailed mitigation plan will be prepared for District Ranger approval before development affecting wetlands is authorized. Necessary Section 404 permits and Section 401 compliance certifications will then be obtained. Riparian assessment surveys will identify areas suitable for restoration.
2. The number of wetland/riparian zone crossings will be minimized by realigning or reducing the width of ski trails.
3. Bridge crossings or box culverts, rather than culverts, will be used to span riparian/wetland areas. Temporary culverts may be used to span small streams and riparian areas during the winter. These culverts will be removed each spring as soon as practicable.
4. Appropriate buffers will be established to protect wetland and riparian values for all wetland units and surrounding areas where ground disturbance may have potential impacts on wetland values.
5. In wet meadow areas traversed by ski lifts and trails, special maintenance plans to minimize disturbances will be prepared for District Ranger approval.
6. Construction techniques that minimize disturbance and avoid compaction around or in wet meadows and riparian areas will be utilized.
7. Facilities will be sited and designed to prevent sedimentation and runoff from entering into the Hood River Meadows and Stringer Meadows wetlands.
8. In all riparian, wetland and other sensitive areas, existing ground cover will be retained and surface disturbance minimized by restricting clearing of ski runs to periods with adequate snow cover. Clearing will occur only when sufficient depth of snow is present (usually 2-3 feet). Selective and limited clearing for surveying purposes is permitted at other times, but yarding will not occur without sufficient snow cover.
9. Changes in hydrology upstream and/or adjacent to wetlands will be avoided in order to prevent dewatering wetland areas.

10. The discharge of plowed snow into wetlands will be avoided to the greatest extent possible.
11. The discharge of waste products and waste waters into wetlands and riparian areas will be avoided.
12. Human and vehicle access to wetlands will be restricted to avoid soil compaction and vegetation trampling. Trails will be designed to deflect hikers from wet areas. -

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC ECOLOGY AND FISHERIES

1. The biological potential for cavity-nesting species will be maintained at Forest Plan standards where available and where safety permits. Ski runs will be designed to maintain the greatest number of snags possible.
2. Public vehicle use of service roads will be restricted to reduce wildlife harassment.
3. Any raptor nests observed in the area will be protected until evaluated by a Forest Service wildlife biologist. Disturbance of raptors or raptor nests will be prohibited except as specifically permitted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). Habitat protection zones will be established, pursuant to Forest Plan standards, for raptor nesting areas.
4. Migratory birds will be protected by conformance to the Migratory Bird Act of 1916 and Forest Plan snag standards.
5. Nuisance species will be managed or removed pursuant to ODFW and county guidelines.
6. Prior to Master Plan implementation, additional surveys will be conducted to verify populations of candidate caddisfly species in streams within the permit area.
7. Prior to Master Plan implementation, protocol surveys for C3 survey and manage species will be conducted and protection standards implemented in accordance with the Forest Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan.
8. Ski runs and other vegetation clearings within identified big game habitats will be designed to minimize widths and vertical sight distances. Final design and actual construction of these trails will occur only after a site-specific review. These site-specific design and construction reviews will focus on minimizing long, linear trail cuts without terrain and/or vegetation breaks.
9. All human foods and garbage associated with development and operation of the ski area will be managed to make it unavailable to animals.
10. The removal of snags and dead and/or down woody material will be limited to that necessary to meet safety standards. Other snags and woody material will be left on-site to benefit species dependent upon them as habitat.

11. Ski trails, lifts and other facilities will be designed to serve as habitat linkages for wildlife species by maintaining the maximum amount of timber and shrub vegetation between timber stands while allowing for safe and quality skiing opportunities. The use of natural openings will be maximized and overstory removal minimized.
12. Disturbances to special or unique habitats including springs, seeps, wallow areas, natural mineral deposits used as licks, and talus will be avoided. If significant disturbance to any of these habitats will occur during development, Forest Service wildlife biologists will be notified so that site-specific mitigation can be developed and implemented prior to disturbance.
13. MHM employees will be trained to assist in any animal control efforts by informing visitors to the permit area of restrictions on domestic pets for the benefit of wildlife.
14. Road construction activities will be restricted between March 1 to July 15 to reduce the impacts on potential nesting Northern spotted owl pairs. Surveys will be conducted to determine nesting status. If non-nesting is determined, the seasonal restriction for that calendar year may be waived.
15. The seasonal restrictions (above) will be applied to the hauling and deposition of excavated material to reduce noise disturbance impacts to nesting owl pairs.
16. To benefit harlequin duck and other riparian associated species, the amount of riparian forest removed for the development of the Westside base will be minimized.
17. To the extent practicable, picnic facilities will be sited in previously impacted areas.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) established by the Forest Plan, and amended by this Decision, represent the maximum amount of deviation to be allowed from the natural characteristic landscape. Those activities which have the potential to exceed these VQOs must be mitigated to the greatest degree practical to attempt to attain the governing standard. Proposed actions that would result in landscape character below inventoried VQO goals must also be mitigated. The objective of mitigation is to minimize negative changes in the landscape by blending proposed development activities with the natural landforms and vegetation patterns. This will be accomplished through manipulation of the form, line, color and texture of the proposed activity to achieve a setting consistent with the governing VQO. The length of time required to achieve the desired effect will be a primary consideration in determining the effectiveness of specific mitigation measures.

1. Prior to Master Plan implementation, architectural theme and site guidelines will be submitted for review by the Forest Landscape Architect and approval by the District Ranger. Direction for architectural design is found in FSM 2380 and in USDA Forest Service Agricultural Handbook #617.
2. Vegetation clearing for lifts, ski trails, service roads, utility corridors, and other facilities will be designed to maximize the screening potential of existing vegetation when possible in conjunction with developing safe and quality ski terrain.

3. Repetitive clearing patterns that would result in straight lines, edges, or geometric shapes of vegetation patterns and openings will be avoided. Where extensive clearing is unavoidable, natural-appearing openings will be created that resemble those of the natural characteristic landscape, such as avalanche chutes, meadows, and fire-related disturbances. Existing openings may be expanded to mimic natural shapes and edges.
4. Edge treatments for all clearings will be designed in consultation with the Forest Landscape Architect. Edge treatments include scalloping and feathering existing vegetation to avoid harsh unnatural linear effects. Edges of clearings in areas of multi-stage and species compositions will be located, to the extent possible, to aid in creating natural-appearing transitional effects.
5. "Leave islands" of existing vegetation will be retained, where possible, to avoid extensive clearing and resulting visual contrast.
6. Where ground surface or landform alteration is unavoidable, contour grading will be used to blend and conceal disturbed areas with adjacent undisturbed ground. Restoration of native grasses and wildflowers will be required to the extent practicable.
7. The creation of extensive cut-and-fill slopes that expose soil colors that contrast with natural conditions will be avoided.
8. Non-reflective materials will be used for exterior surfaces that blend with the environment. Facilities with reflective exterior surfaces (metal, glass, plastic, etc.) which do not blend with the summer environment should be temporarily removed, covered, painted, stained, chemically treated, etched, sandblasted, corrugated, or otherwise treated in a manner to meet solar reflectivity standards in Forest Service Manual 2380.
9. Facilities will be constructed of materials which blend with the earthtone colors of the environment. Buildings, structures, facilities and utilities will be constructed of native material, and/or painted, stained, or modified to achieve the required visual blending. Exterior colors, shapes, and textures of all facilities, except when required for safety, will be subordinate to the surrounding landscape. All exterior colors and materials will be approved by the authorized Forest Service representative prior to construction.
10. Exterior lighting will be designed to illuminate horizontal, or ground plane, surfaces only. The lighting of vertical surfaces, such as walls, which can be seen from sensitive viewpoints will be avoided. Exterior lights should be from the warm spectrum wavelength, such as high pressure sodium, or other "yellow" sources.
11. The best available glazing technology will be used to subdue light transmission to the exterior of facilities. Shading devices will be used as appropriate to eliminate exterior light transmission.
12. Natural topographic features and vegetation buffers will be used to conceal and blend proposed facilities with the forest setting. Structures such as lift towers will be located at the edges of natural openings to the extent possible to avoid excessive vegetation clearing.
13. Facilities on ridge-lines will be designed so that contrasting profiles or skylines are minimized.

14. Native trees and shrubs of appropriate sizes and species composition will be planted to screen contrasting developments from sensitive viewpoints.
15. All utilities will be installed underground, except where technically infeasible.
16. Litter from ski runs, base areas, and along access roads will be removed immediately after snowmelt each year.
17. A forested buffer will be retained between the Hood River Meadows base and Old Highway 35 to reduce the impacts of base area expansion.
18. The mid-mountain restaurant will be blended into its natural surroundings through appropriate architectural style and colors.
19. A comprehensive signage plan will be developed within two years of Master Plan authorization.
20. Ground disturbance will be minimized in future projects visible from the Timberline Trail, especially the foreground zone (within 1/2 mile). This includes slope grooming, road building, culverting of streams, and grading of pads for structures. Where ground disturbance is deemed necessary, careful design and strict restoration specifications will be required. At a minimum, contour grading plans, revegetation plans, and exterior architectural plans for buildings visible from the Timberline Trail will be required.
21. As new projects are added within the Timberline Trail watershed, visual impacts will be reduced to the extent feasible. These include: changing chair colors to natural tones; revegetating existing disturbed areas, including introduction of native flowering plants to non-native meadows; removal of old water bars where they are no longer needed; planting of native shrubs around old high stumps; moving electrical boxes and cables to the side of light poles away from the trail; staining existing concrete pads dark colors; repainting lift towers to warm grey tones (like tree bark color); staining the light poles to match tree bark; gradually unifying the architecture of the base area to a common theme (roof lines, material, forms); developing and implementing a sign plan, and removing all winter only signs during summer; removing "race shacks" during summer; storing vehicles, grooming machines, tractors, etc. in an area not visible from the Timberline and Umbrella Falls trails; placing signs at either end of the ski area and at the Umbrella Falls trailhead to inform the visitor that they are in the ski area and to help prepare them to encounter facilities that may conflict with their expectations about the degree of naturalness of the landscape.
22. **If** authorized, the OR Highway 35 overpass will be designed architecturally, with appropriate forms, colors, and textures that blend into the natural landscape character. A "gateway" effect to the upper mountain should be created, similar to entering a National Park or recreation area. Existing bare areas in the vicinity of the overpass/interchange will be restored with native vegetation.
23. **If** access road improvements are authorized by FHWA, a **landscape** plan will be submitted for District Ranger approval to mitigate impacts to vegetation and to maintain an aesthetically pleasing driving experience in the access road (Forest Road 3555) corridor. This plan will create

irregular (scalloped) clearing edges to create a more natural-appearing forested roadside and stimulate visual interest for users of the road. The landscape plan will also address the following:

- Intennittent thinning to enhance the visual characteristics along the road and to showcase scenic vistas;
- Retention or replacement of vegetative debris on the ground to **maintain** a natural appearance;
- Revegetation of new cut slopes by placing salvaged topsoil on the exposed slopes where possible, followed by seeding, mulching and fertilizing;
- Regrading and rehabilitating abandoned road segments to blend into the surrounding topography; and
- Revegetation of the abandoned road segment with indigenous species through a combination of seeding and transplanting of existing plants and nursery stock, especially young trees and shrubs.

WILDERNESS

Wilderness use attributable to MHM development will be monitored and appropriate measures implemented to reduce Wilderness impacts. If necessary, a permit system will be established to limit Wilderness access via the Timberline Trail.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

1. A program will be cooperatively developed by the Forest Service, the permittee, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (CTWS) to protect treaty rights, to facilitate access to the permit area for traditional uses and other activities, and to minimize impacts to treaty resources and traditional uses.
2. The Timberline Trail will be protected as a cultural and recreational resource and maintained in its natural conditions to the greatest extent possible.
3. The skid trail crossing of Timberline Trail west of the mountain restaurant will be abandoned and rehabilitated.
4. Cultural resource interpretive opportunities will be integrated into any interpretive facilities/programs. Specific resource locations will not be disclosed in interpretive displays or programs.
5. Any deterioration or vandalism of the Timberline Trail will be promptly reported to the Forest Service Archaeologist.
6. Crossing the Timberline Trail will be avoided during timber felling and tower construction for new lifts and runs. Helicopters may be required to avoid machinery crossings of the trail. The District Ranger will monitor construction activities, with written reports by a cultural resource technician or archaeologist provided to the Forest Archaeologist.

7. Additional consultation will be undertaken with the State Historic Preservation Office and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for any action that may affect the Timberline Trail.
8. Cultural resource surveys will be conducted pursuant to Forest Service and State Historic Preservation Office standards prior to construction of any authorized facilities.
9. Impacts to new cultural sites identified during surveys for future projects will be avoided through project modifications. Sites that cannot be avoided, *if* found to be significant, will be mitigated through measures identified in consultation with SHPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.
10. If cultural resource sites or materials are encountered during project construction, all activity in the immediate area will cease and the Forest Archaeologist consulted. The Archaeologist will determine the significance of the materials and specify appropriate mitigation measures in consultation with the CTWS.

NOISE

1. All activities will comply with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) noise control regulations and standards. **If** excessive noise is identified, a noise abatement program will be developed in consultation with DEQ.
2. Noise levels associated with authorized summer uses will be monitored to ensure that they do not impact areas beyond the immediate vicinity of the Main Lodge base. Outside amplification will not be permitted.
3. All major equipment will be housed inside well-constructed buildings and all buildings will be designed so that noise from equipment based therein is substantially reduced.
4. Construction blasting will be avoided in areas that are prone to snow slides, landslides, or other geologic hazards. Blasting contractors will consult with the authorized Forest Representative to determine when snow and other site conditions are stable enough to permit blasting at construction sites.

RECREATION

1. All aerial and surface lifts will be designed, constructed, maintained, operated and inspected in accordance with American National Standard Safety Requirements for Aerial Passenger Tramway (ANSI B77.1), as supplemented by Forest Service standards (FSM 2721.48 and 2721.6).
2. The permittee(s) will be responsible for assisting the USFS in the construction, management and maintenance, per USFS standards, of all nordic and hiking trails within the permit area.
3. Any increase in motorized uses will be limited to authorized special guided uses. The area will remain closed to off-road vehicles (ORVs), except for administrative purposes.

4. A buffer adequate to prevent conflicts between fee and non-fee users will be provided between MHM's nordic trails and adjacent Forest Service nordic trails.
5. Indicators and standards of acceptable social and resource conditions for summer uses will be identified through the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) process within the first 5 years of approval of a new master plan. The LAC process will identify limits for such things as encounters, noise levels, erosion and vegetation loss from summer users and the type, number and use of summer recreation facilities. Standards will be within the framework provided by the authorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes. Indicators identified in the LAC process for social, managerial, resource and experience conditions will be routinely monitored.
6. Summer activities that would interfere with the experiences or change the setting in adjacent ROS zones within or outside of the permit area will be restricted.
7. As part of MHM's annual Operating Plan, a program of activities for ski camp participants that shows planned activities for non-skiing periods and their locations will be submitted for District Ranger approval. These activities will conform to ROS criteria and Forest *Service* recreation management strategies.
8. Use on trails within the permit area will be monitored to ensure that it does not exceed ROS standards. The effects of recreation uses on soils and vegetation near the base areas will be monitored to ensure that they do not exceed conditions which maintain ecosystem health.
9. Hiking trails and picnic areas will be designed to maintain as much of the surrounding area as possible in a natural, uncompacted, vegetated state. Soil compaction and vegetation loss (including large trees) will be routinely monitored in picnic area and in other popular use areas within the permit area.
10. To minimize impacts to open terrain, picnic sites, with garbage containers, will be located along hiking trail routes.
11. New hiking trails within the permit area will be routed through areas that provide natural topographic and timber screening from developed facilities, such as lift terminals and towers.
12. No fee will be imposed by the permittee for public access to hiking trails within and near the permit area.
13. Relocating hiking trails in order to site new facilities will be avoided to the greatest extent possible. Where existing trails are impacted by new facilities, screening will be utilized to reduce visual and noise impacts.
14. **If** necessary, a permit program will be established to limit the number of people using hiking trails at anyone time.
15. Public parking will be provided for Umbrella Falls Trail and Sahalie Falls Trail users at base areas. No fee will be imposed by the permittee for this parking.

16. If an overpass interchange is authorized by FHWA, parking spaces lost to OR Hwy. 35 overpass construction will be replaced by expanding the Bennett Pass Sno-Park to the north.
17. If an overpass interchange is authorized by FHWA, the vault toilet at the Bennett Pass Sno-Park will be moved to another location close to the Bennett Pass trailhead.
18. If an overpass interchange is authorized by FHWA, safe and convenient trailhead access will be provided from parking spaces to the south of the overpass.
19. Winter road maintenance operations will avoid snow removal impacts to Bennett Pass trailhead staging areas and trail surfaces.

LAND USE/SOCIOECONOMICS

1. The Forest Service will cooperate with Hood River and Clackamas Counties to encourage commercial and residential land uses on appropriately-zoned lands within established communities.

TRANSPORTATION

1. In cooperation with OnOT, a traffic monitoring program will be maintained at MHM to be able to determine the effectiveness of traffic mitigation measures and the correlation of ski area usage to the total traffic volume.
2. The amount of parking authorized will be limited as a means to promote alternative transportation modes and to minimize the land area committed to development. The average annual growth in background traffic on US 26 (2.6%) will be used to calculate the amount of additional permit area parking to be authorized at each phase of development. This growth rate will be applied to the amount of parking needed to serve the authorized increase in PAOT to determine the annual incremental increase in the total amount of parking authorized. The annual parking allocation may be accumulated (banked) to provide for a critical mass, rather than increments, of parking.
3. Prior to implementation of any additional authorized parking, MHM will develop, in cooperation with OnOT, a mitigation plan to address winter peak period traffic congestion on Highway 26 attributable to the MHM Ski Area.
4. MHM is encouraged to implement a variety of ski area operational measures to mitigate traffic, including:
 - Continue the program with Hood River retailers for food/beverage discounts at Hood River restaurants.
 - Continue price incentives for off-peak skiing.
 - Continue promotional packages that sell combinations of lift tickets and bus transportation.
 - Maintain the reader board along Forest Road 3555 to advise departing drivers of travel times on OR Highway 35 versus US Highway 26.
 - Continue to actively promote the use of OR Highway 35 as an alternative to US Highway 26.

- Expand night skiing to help reduce peak hour arrivals/departures.
5. The Forest Service will participate in multi-disciplinary approaches, e.g., a Highway 26 transit feasibility analysis, to evaluate and resolve traffic issues resulting from regional recreational uses. Mitigation requirements, e.g., parking allocation, will be modified as appropriate to reflect the results of these efforts.
 6. The design of an on-site traffic circulation system, addressing full ski area buildout, will be developed prior to Master Plan implementation.
 7. Service roads will be constructed and maintained to Forest Service road design specifications. New service roads will be located in the most environmentally sensitive manner after site-specific environmental analysis.
 8. The Forest Service will support ODOT in providing additional chaining areas on Highways 26 and 35.
 9. A rehabilitation plan for the Robinhood quarry will be approved by the District Ranger prior to its use as a disposal site for road construction waste materials. The following measures will be included as plan requirements:
 - Push material into the back of the existing pit as far as possible, then built up increasingly higher with equipment. Terrace the new material with 1-2% outsloping, then revegetate as soon as possible with shrubs, grasses and trees per a botanical prescription. Apply erosion control measures over the seeded area and maintain until vegetation is established. Slope edges and sides of terraces to the next layer at an angle shallow enough to minimize sheet erosion and gulleying.
 - Build a berm at toe of terraced area to catch runoff water. Channel water down a constructed ditchline along the access road toward the Gumjuwak trailhead. Along the ditch, build a series of sediment traps in such a way to enable mechanical cleanout.
 - Inslope the existing road into the same ditch (which should be rock armored). Keep the road usable by backhoe equipment used to clean sediment basins. When entire area is satisfactorily vegetated, obliterate the road in a Jru!!Uler that helps achieve VQOs.
 - Retain the bridge over the East Fork Hood River. After rehabilitation work is complete, place a lockable bollard in front of the bridge to prevent vehicular use, but allow for pedestrian and equestrian crossing.

UTILITIES/ENERGY

1. The permittee will be encouraged to emphasize energy conservation in the maintenance and design of facilities and to utilize solar opportunities in the construction of new facilities.
2. All water, telephone, and power transmission lines will be installed underground except where impractical.
3. Utilities will be consolidated within common trenches where possible and located in stable soil areas.

4. All EPA and DEQ requirements relating to underground storage tanks will be met and a monitoring system developed to detect leaks in tanks or pipes.