

Kapka Butte Sno-park Environmental Assessment Scenic Resources Report

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Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the proposed Sno-park and winter recreation trails near Kapka Butte and snowmobile play area relocation at Dutchman's Flat and the anticipated effects on the area's scenic resources in terms of impacts on scenery, aesthetics, recreation sites and trails for winter and summer use, and visitor experience especially along the Cascade Lakes National Scenic Byway (Highway 46), Forest Road 45 to Sunriver, and Mt. Bachelor Ski Area.

Management Direction

The Forest Plan for the Deschutes National Forest provides standards and guidelines for an array of land uses referred to as management areas. The management areas for Scenic Views are described in terms of desired future conditions for various settings and how these are to be met by specified activities or actions. The Scenery Management System (SMS) is the methodology used by Forest Service landscape architects since 1996 to provide a visual impact assessment of effects to scenic resources which integrates social impacts to recreation visitors with physical impacts to the visitor experience.

This current and more holistic system includes the human element as an integral part of the ecosystem and has been the methodology used in place of the previous outdated Visual Quality System (VQS) of 1974 which continues to be referenced in Forest Plans that have not yet been updated to reference the current SMS instead. To facilitate this change in methodology, both systems have been referenced by applying SMS and including the VQS in parentheses such as High Scenic Integrity - SMS (Retention – VQS).

The Forest Service implementing regulations currently establish a variety of Scenic Integrity Levels for Scenic Views – MA9 (LMRP page 4-121). These standards and guidelines include:

- High Scenic Integrity Level – SMS - Natural Appearing Landscape (Retention – VQS) - MA 9, SV-1 Foreground, SV-3 Middleground
- Moderate Scenic Integrity Level - SMS - Slightly Altered Landscape (Partial Retention – VQS) - MA 9, SV-2 Foreground, SV-4 Middleground
- Low Scenic Integrity Level – SMS - Altered Landscape (Modification – VQS or General Forest) - MA 8, GFO within Foreground as well as Middleground

Scenery Management Objectives are defined in terms of Scenic Integrity Levels which describe existing conditions and whether the landscape is visually perceived to be “complete” or not. The most complete or highest rating for Scenic Integrity Levels means having little or no deviation from the landscape character that makes it appealing and attractive to visitors and local residents. In addition to describing existing conditions,

Scenic Integrity Levels also describe the level of development allowed and ways to mitigate deviations from the area's landscape character.

The goal of the Scenic Views Management Area is to provide high quality scenery representing the natural character of Central Oregon. The general theme and objectives of Scenic Views is for landscapes seen from selected travel routes and use areas to be managed to maintain or enhance the appearance of the areas being viewed. To the casual observer, results of activities will either not be evident or will be visually subordinate to the natural landscape.

Analysis Methods

Methodology used for analyzing impacts to scenic resources is the Scenery Management System which uses "Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management." Issued in 1995, this new handbook replaces "Agriculture Handbook 462 – The Visual Management System" which was issued in 1974. While many of the basic inventory elements of the Visual Management System are retained, the Scenery Management System incorporates both the natural and human processes into the ideas of managing for ecosystems.

Existing Condition

The proposed Kapka Sno-park, Nordic Sno-park, and new trails are located between Kapka Butte and the junction of Highway 46 (Cascade Lakes National Scenic Byway) and Road 45 to Sunriver. The project area is located about 19 miles west of Bend, Oregon (Township 18S, Range 9E, Section 35) and lies within the M9 - Scenic Views management area of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan. The Scenic Views Management Areas are classified as High Scenic Integrity (Scenery Management System) or Retention (Visual Management System) SV-1 Foreground along both sides of the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and Medium Scenic Integrity (SMS) or Partial Retention (VMS) SV-2 Foreground along both sides of Forest Road 45.

Both the existing and proposed snowmobile play areas at Dutchman Flat and around Kapka Butte are within an Intensive Recreation Management Area and highly visible from the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and Mt. Bachelor Ski Area. The existing snowmobile play area is currently very close to the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and its proposed relocation closer to Kapka Butte would be further north and away from the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway. Current motorized noise levels can be heard and vehicular congestion can be seen from surrounding areas. Multiple user groups converge upon this area for the best scenic views to the Three Sisters, Broken Top, and Mt. Bachelor and the extremely popular recreation experience intensely marketed by the area's tourism agencies, summer and winter resorts, and ski area.

Direct and Indirect Effects

For the action alternatives, there would be no negative direct or indirect effects on scenic views if the existing vegetative screen were to be maintained or added (due to the screen being compromised due to insect and disease, fire, or other causes) between the parking

area and scenic travel corridors to the north and to the west. The project meets the standards and guidelines for the Scenic Views Management Area as stated in the Forest Plan.

To the north, the proposed Sno-park has a setback of more than 300 feet from Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway. There is an existing vegetation screen between Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and the Sno-park that acts as a visual buffer with possibly filtered views. The proposed Sno-park is lower in elevation than the highway. To the west, there is a setback of about 200 feet from Road 45 and fewer trees exist so the views from the road are much more open to the Sno-park. Planting additional mixed conifer trees would create a more effective visual buffer and vegetation screen between the road and the Sno-park. This would be a necessary mitigation to maintain scenic quality because of the more open views caused by the high probability of tree mortality in this area due to insect and disease.

Some of the trails would be visible from Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and Forest Road 45 but would be mostly screened by existing trees or the location of the trails away from the roads. The trails that appear to be closest to the roads are non-motorized and would not affect scenic quality or other visitor experience in terms of noise or air pollution.

Cumulative Effects

For the action alternatives, there would be no cumulative effects that would be detrimental to scenic views. To mitigate situations which would result in more exposed and open views and greater noise and air pollution to the proposed parking area and new trails at Kapka Sno-Park and the proposed Nordic Sno-park, and the relocated snowmobile play area at Dutchman Flat, planting of additional mixed conifer trees as a visual buffer and vegetation screen would be required. This would mitigate scenic quality and the visitor experience for those traveling on the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and Forest Road 45, the scenic travel corridor from Sunriver to Mt. Bachelor. Currently, the proposed Sno-park areas have visual buffers and vegetation screens on all sides with the exception of the area that is to the west of the proposed Kapka Sno-park along Forest Road 45.

There are no views to the Sno-parks from surrounding trails or buttes and the proposed Sno-parks are not visible from other existing Sno-parks. The existing and proposed trails in the vicinity would not be visually impacted by the development of the proposed Sno-parks. By maintaining and providing visual buffers to open views of the proposed Sno-parks, the standards and guidelines for the Scenic Views Management Area as stated in the Forest Plan would be met.

The relocation of the existing snowmobile play area at Dutchman Flat would be further away from the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and closer to the surrounding forested areas so would not detract from scenic views visible from Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway or other scenic travel corridors. In terms of recreation planning, the proposed snowmobile play area would be better sited for motorized vehicles to travel away from Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway and away from non-motorized recreation areas such as Mt. Bachelor Ski area and Nordic Lodge. Although the proposed improvements at Dutchman Flat are in

the Intensive Recreation management area, the cumulative effects upon the scenic quality of the area's along the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway that are in the Scenic Views Management Area would not be negatively impacted.

References

USDA Forest Service, 1990. *Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)*

USDA Forest Service, 1996. *Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management*