A. **Project Description**

The Lakeview Ranger District proposes to treat numerous headcuts on an unnamed tributary of Thomas Creek to improve passage and habitat for the Modoc sucker (listed as Endangered under Endangered Species Act) and Redband trout (listed as Sensitive for Region 6 of the USFS). Thomas Creek is also considered a Priority Watershed for the Fremont-Winema National Forests under Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) (1995).

The Thomas Creek Tributary Headcut Stabilization project will stabilize headcuts on an unnamed tributary of Thomas Creek that are inhibiting passage for native fish. It is approximately 15 miles northwest of Lakeview, Oregon and east of Cox Flat; the 2800-027 road runs along the south side of the unnamed tributary. Reconnaissance of the tributary in 2009 revealed approximately 24 headcuts, varying from one to four feet in vertical height, along one mile of stream occupied by native fish. During field surveys conducted over the last three years, Modoc suckers have been present in the unnamed tributary below the headcuts. This project will treat approximately 15 of the headcuts that lie in the lower gradient portion of the stream using stabilization techniques of rock and/or wood grade structures. By completing stream channel restoration in this unnamed tributary, fish passage and water quality will improve and Riparian Habitat Conservation Area (RHCA) will be protected and enhanced, as recommended by the Upper Thomas Creek Watershed Analysis (1996). If determined necessary, a short-term exclosure fenceline will be installed around the project area to exclude livestock grazing and facilitate natural regeneration of native plants to help stabilize the channel.

Decommission of a non-system road within the floodplain of the tributary will reduce erosion and improve riparian vegetation. Decommissioning will involve scarification of roadbed and scattering large wood and rocks over disturbed soil to improve soil infiltration and prevent vehicle access.

B. **Location**

The project area is specifically described as: Township 37S, Range 18E, sections 23 and 24, W.M., Lake County, Oregon (refer to map).
C. **Existing Conditions and Desired Condition**

The Thomas Creek Tributary Headcut Stabilization project has identified multiple headcuts on an unnamed tributary as barriers to fish migration. The active headcuts are moving upward through a small riparian area, reducing natural fish habitat.

The project area is designated as Management Area 15 (MA 15). MA 15 overlaps other Management Areas, superseding management direction. MA 15 represents aquatic and riparian zones of all drainages and water bodies, and their immediately adjacent uplands will be managed to meet the objectives of MA 15. MA 15 will be managed to maintain or improve water quality, fish habitat, recreation opportunities, and riparian habitat for dependent wildlife species. MA 15 includes streams of all classes, as well as ephemeral draws, seeps and springs. The Forest Plan amendment for INFISH (1995) amended the standards and guidelines by creating RHCA’s and Riparian Management Objects (RMOs).

RHCA’s, as defined in INFISH (1995), are portions of watersheds where riparian dependent resources receive primary emphasis and management activities are subject to specific standards and guidelines.

Desired conditions at the site are to aggrade the stream channel through the meadow to provide fish passage through the reach.

D. **Need for the Proposal**

The purpose of the Thomas Creek Tributary Headcut Stabilization project is to aggrade the creek through the riparian area using natural streambed substrate and provide fish passage through the reach.

It is essential for the Forest to seek out opportunities to maintain and restore habitats and to carry out such projects when funding permits. The enactment of this proposed action would meet standards and guidelines for, specifically, roads management (RF-2, RF-3c, RF-5), grazing management (GM-1, GM-3), watershed and habitat restoration (WR-1), and fisheries and wildlife restoration (FW-1) for RHCA’s outlined in INFISH (1995). Approval of this project will allow the Lakeview Ranger District to fulfill its obligation to meet goals also outlined in INFISH (1995). The goals that will be met by this proposal pertain to maintenance and restoration of:

- “water quality, to a degree that provides for stable and productive riparian and aquatic ecosystems;
- stream channel integrity, channel processes, and the sediment regime (including the elements of timing, volume, and character of sediment input and transport) under which the riparian and aquatic ecosystems developed;
- instream flows to support healthy riparian and aquatic habitats, the stability and effective function of stream channels, and the ability to route flood discharges;
- diversity and productivity of native plant communities in riparian zones;
- riparian vegetation, to:
  - provide an amount and distribution of large woody debris characteristic of natural aquatic and riparian ecosystems;
  - help achieve rates of surface erosion, bank erosion, and channel migration characteristic of those under which the communities developed
- riparian and aquatic habitats necessary to foster the unique genetic fish stocks that evolved within the specific geo-climatic region; and
- habitat to support populations of well-distributed native plant, vertebrate, and invertebrate populations that contribute to the viability of riparian-dependent communities,” (1995).

E. **Decision to be Made**

Should the proposed action, an alternative action, or a modified version of an action alternative be implemented, or should no action be taken at this time on the Thomas Creek Tributary Headcut Stabilization project?

Would the proposed action have a significant impact upon the quality of the human environment and thus require development of an environmental impact statement (EIS)?

Is the selected action consistent with the management direction of the Forest Plan or is a site-specific Forest Plan Amendment necessary?

Is additional information needed to support the selection of an action alternative?