The Knebal Spring Trail System connects with numerous non-motorized trail opportunities. The overall purpose of this project is to provide a safe recreational experience for non-motorized users, including mountain bikers, equestrian riders and hikers. Another purpose of the project is to eliminate the current trespassing into the City of The Dalles Municipal Watershed along Forest Service Road (FSR) 1720-120.

As such, there are the underlying needs of:

- Connecting the existing non-motorized trails;
- Removing the current route off FSR 1700 and 1720; and,
- Creating a safe trail experience for recreational users.

**Proposed Action**

Approximately 2 miles of trail will be constructed, removing the existing use off FSR 1700 and 1720. Approximately 0.9 miles will be in City of The Dalles Municipal Watershed. The proposed trail will start at Knebal Springs Trail (Forest Service Trail #474) and run westerly, paralleling and south of FSR 1720. It will then cross FSR 1720 at the junction of FSR 17 and then run northerly and parallel FSR 17 on the eastside, ending at the junction of FSR 1700-014. FSR 1700-014 connects with Surveyor’s Ridge Trail (Forest Service Trail #688).

The trail construction will be routed to the south of FSR 1720 in order to minimize trespass into the City of The Dalles Municipal Watershed. Trail construction will consist of a minimal clearing limit and tread width because the trail is located completely within The Dalles Watershed Fuelbreak (2007) project area. This area has recently been harvested and most of this proposed route will follow existing skid roads.

Trail access will remain open to mountain bikes, hikers and equestrian use. The Bicycle Trail Class 2 standards with increased clearing limits for height to accommodate equestrian users will be used for this non-motorized trail. This will require minimal clearing due to the openness of the area. The tread width will be 24 inches with a clearing limit of 39-inches wide or 6-foot centerline of tread and a clearing of height 10–feet. A small bridge consisting of planks, boards, or logs will be used to cross the historic ditch site. See Forest Service Handbook 2309.18, 23.11 – Exhibit 01 (FSH 2309.18-2008-4, Effective 10/18/2008) for more details on the trail design. The project will be implemented in Spring/Summer 2013.
Project Design Criteria/Mitigation Measures

The National Environmental Policy Act defines “mitigation” as avoiding, minimizing, rectifying, reducing, eliminating or compensating project impacts presented in the proposed action. These project design features are used to minimize the environmental impacts of the proposed actions. The following are a required component of the proposed action to address resource management concerns and to guide the removal of trees for restoration projects.

- Since the project is within disruption distance to a known historical spotted owl activity center. The map below shows the area that needs to have cross cut saws used if trees need to be bucked. Chainsaws can be used outside the delineated area.

Figure 1: Map of Northern Spotted Owl disturbance restrictions.
• Cleaning and washing of vehicles is required for those vehicles that are to be utilized for the ground disturbing activities, such as used in trail construction (mechanical wheelbarrow) and soil reshaping within this project area. Coordinate with the noxious weed specialist for details that will involve implementing wash station locations if needed.

• When the need for restoration/revegetation of old trails and the reshaping of ground occurs, the use of native plant materials are the first choice for meeting this objective. Where timely natural regeneration of the native plant community is not likely to occur, non-native, non-invasive plant species may be used in any of the following situations:

  1) When needed in emergency conditions to protect basic resource values (e.g., soil stability, water quality and to help prevent the establishment of invasive species);
  2) As an interim, non-persistent measure designed to aid in the re-establishment of native plants;
  3) If native plant materials are not available; or,
  4) In permanently altered plant communities.

  Suggested native tree and shrub species for this project include black cottonwood, red alder, Scouler’s willow, red-osier dogwood, wild rose, and snowberry. Idaho fescue grass seed is available for re-seeding disturbed areas.

• If using straw, hay or mulch for restoration/revegetation in any areas, use only certified, weed-free materials.

**Scoping and Public Involvement**

The Forest Service conducted public scoping and notice & comment periods concurrently to identify any concerns with the proposed activities. The comment period was provided pursuant to the March 6, 2012, judicial ruling in Sequoia ForestKeeper v. Tidwell, order issued by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California. The Knebal Springs Super Connector Trail Construction project was published on the Mt. Hood National Forest website in December 2012. A legal notice was published in *The Oregonian* (Newspaper of Record) on April 3, 2013. A letter was distributed to approximately 60 individuals and organizations, including local, state, tribal and federal governmental agencies; environmental groups; and local non-profits organizations including watershed groups.

Through these efforts, 57 comments were received from 44 Trails, Bankcountry Horseman of Oregon, Central Oregon Trail Alliance, Cog Wild Mountain Bike Tours, Columbia Area Mountain Biking Advocates (CAMBA), Dakine, Eldorado Dirt Works, Fat Tire Farm, Mountain View Cycles, Northwest Trail Alliance, TheGorgeisMyGym.com, Timberline Ski Area, plus 42 individuals. All comments received were supportive of the project. The comments from Backcountry Horseman recommended increasing the height clearing limit to 10-feet to better accommodate equestrian riders. This change has been incorporated to the Proposed Action and communicated with the group.
Decision

I have decided to implement the trail construction project as proposed. It is my decision to construction approximately 2 miles of trail, removing the existing use off Forest Service Roads 1700 and 1720 and reducing trespassing into the City of The Dalles Municipal Watershed.

Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I find the proposed action for Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Resort 2013 Maintenance projects can be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement because the action fits into Category 31.2-1 [36 CFR 220.6(e)(1)], described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2007-1, April 17, 2009. This category states: “Construction and reconstruction of trails”.

I find the proposed actions can be categorically excluded because there are no extraordinary circumstances identified by the interdisciplinary team of resource specialists that analyzed this proposal. Resource conditions that were considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation are listed below (A-F). As stated in Section 30.3 of the handbook, “the mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist” (FSH 1909.15).

A. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species designated critical habitat. Biological Evaluations were prepared for sensitive, threatened or endangered wildlife, fish and botanical species. These are available in the project record, located at the Hood River Ranger District in Parkdale, Oregon.

Northern spotted owls are the only federally listed and sensitive species wildlife species in or adjacent to the project area. The trail construction will be no effect to northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentals caurina*) because of the project design criteria/mitigation measures (PDC). The PDC prohibit the use of chainsaws within the disruption distance to a known historical spotted owl activity center. No critical habitat, suitable or dispersal habitat will be removed as part of this project. The effects associated with this project are covered under “Informal programmatic consultation for activities with the potential to disturb spotted owls (*Strix occidentals caurina*) within the Willamette Planning Province for FY 2010-2013” (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Reference: 13420-2009-I-0127). As such, no additional consultation is required.

Within the project area, there are no listed fish present. Critical habitat and essential fish habitat is not designated in the action area under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Lastly, there are no federally threatened or endangered botanical species in the project area. Consultation is not required for aquatic or botanical
species.

B. **Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.** Analysis for the effects of the project on floodplains, wetlands and municipal watersheds is included in the Fisheries Biological Evaluations contained in the project record. A portion of the proposed trail is located along portions of the southwestern and western ridgeline areas of the City of The Dalles Municipal Watershed. The proposed trail should have no influence in the proper function of maintaining high quality and quantity water to the City of The Dalles residents from the municipal watershed. This project is outside all riparian reserves or areas of influence to riparian reserves. All Best Management Practices will be followed during project implementation. As such, this project will have no impact to the City of The Dalles Municipal Watershed. There are no wetlands or floodplains in the action area.

C. **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.** The project is not located in congressionally designated areas.

D. **Inventoried roadless areas.** The project is not located in inventoried roadless areas.

E. **Research natural areas.** The project is not located in research natural areas.

F. **American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites / Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** A complete heritage resource inventory survey was performed for the proposed projects. The heritage resource survey followed protocol established in the 2004 Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement between the Region 6 USDA Forest Service, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. No heritage resources will be negatively affected by the project.

**Findings Required by Other Laws**

**National Forest Management Act:** The interdisciplinary team reviewed the applicable Standards and Guidelines of this proposal. The analysis demonstrated that this decision is consistent the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act.

**Management Indicator Species (MIS):** The impacts to MIS are included in the fisheries and wildlife biological evaluations available in the project record. There are no aquatic MIS located within the project area. Wildlife MIS within the project area include the northern spotted owl, mule deer and elk, Pileated woodpecker, turkey and gray squirrel. There is no habitat being removed for any of these species. As such, I find that the selected alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines pertaining to MIS, and that based on the limited effects to any MIS, this project does not contribute towards a negative trend in viability on the Forest.

**Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species:** All resource areas used the Region 6 Regional Forester’s 2011 Sensitive Species list for this analysis. I have considered the impacts to aquatics, botanical and wildlife species as disclosed in the biological evaluations (available in the project record). There are no sensitive aquatic or botanical specie present within the
project area. No habitat is being impacted for wildlife sensitive species within the action area. As such, the trail construction project has no effect to sensitive species.

**Northwest Forest Plan:** I have determined that the Proposed Action is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Record of Decision (USDA and USDI, 1994), including the subsequent decisions regarding the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and Survey and Manage.

**Aquatic Conservation Strategy:** I find that this project is consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives. The ACS analysis is contained in the project record. At the site scale, conditions described in the nine ACS objectives will be maintained because there are no riparian/stream impacts. The indicators address water quality, habitat access, habitat elements, channel conditions and dynamics, flow/hydrology, and watershed conditions.

**Survey and Manage:** No habitat for aquatic survey and manage species was present, within the project area so surveys were not required. No botanical survey and manage species were identified during the surveys. All botanical surveys were consistent with the 2001 Survey and Manage Record of Decision. Lastly, the project is not removing any wildlife survey and manage species habitat, so surveys are not required. As such, this project is consistent with all survey requirements from the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (USFS et al. 2001).

**Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Laws:** The aquatics biological evaluation has determined that this project complies with the Clean Water Act and state water quality laws, which will protect beneficial uses. With Best Management Practices, water quality will be maintained through implementation of this Proposed Action.

**Invasive Plants:** By considering the prevention of invasive plant introduction, establishment and spread of invasive plants, the planning process is consistent with the Pacific Northwest Invasive Plant Program Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants Record of Decision issued in 2005 and the Site-Specific Invasive Plant Treatments for Mt. Hood National Forest and Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in Oregon, including Forest Plan Amendment #16 Record of Decision issued in 2008. A noxious weed risk assessment was prepared for this project.

**Other Laws or Requirements:** Finding associated with the Endangered Species Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and National Historic Preservation Act are discussed under the Reasons for Categorical Exclusion section of this document. The Proposed Action is consistent with all other Federal, State, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment and cultural resources.

**Implementation**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations 36 CFR 215.12(e)(1), because only supportive comments were received during the 30-day comment period, which ran from April 3 through May 3, 2013. Implementation may occur immediately.
after publication of the legal notice in the Newspaper of Record (*The Oregonian*) pursuant to 36 CFR 215.9(c)(1). Implementation is scheduled to occur in the Summer 2013.

**Contact Person**

Detailed records of this environmental analysis are available for public review at the Barlow Ranger District. For further information about this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, please contact Jennie O’Connor Card at the 541-352-1255 or Email: jennieoconnorcard@fs.fed.us. Also, you may contact Jim Thornton for more information on project implementation at Barlow Ranger District, 780 NE Court Street, Dufur OR 97021; 541-476-2291; or Email: jthornton@fs.fed.us.

**SIGNATURE OF DECIDING OFFICER**

/s/ Janeen Tervo

June 3, 2013

Janeen Tervo
Acting District Ranger, Barlow Ranger District

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