

Cliff Knox Project

Wilderness Areas, Preliminary Administratively Recommended Wilderness Areas, and Potential Wilderness Areas



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for:
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Affected Environment

Wilderness Areas

The Malheur National Forest contains 81,970 acres of designated wilderness in two wilderness areas: Strawberry Mountain (69,350 acres), and Monument Rock (19,650 acres, of which 12,620 are located on the Malheur National Forest). Neither of these wilderness areas are within or adjacent to the Cliff Knox planning area; therefore, there would be no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to wilderness areas.

Potential Wilderness Areas

Potential wilderness areas on the Malheur National Forest were identified in the February 2014 Draft and June 2018 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests Revised Land Management Plans (USDA Forest Service 2014c and 2018), following Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 chapter 70. Refer to the Wilderness Need Evaluation for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests for a description of the process for evaluating wilderness need. Through this process, 19 potential wilderness areas were identified on the Malheur National Forest. These areas cover 149,590 acres or 9 percent of the Malheur National Forest system lands. Refer to the Malheur National Forest Review of Areas with Wilderness Potential for a complete list of each of the 19 areas.

There is one identified potential wilderness area located within the Cliff Knox planning area and it is associated with the 7,280-acre Malheur Inventoried Roadless area. The Malheur River Potential Wilderness area (Figure 1) is about 5,790 acres. Refer to the Malheur National Forest Review of Areas with Wilderness Potential for a complete description of the area.

This report would evaluate whether the Cliff Knox project would cause the 5,790-acre potential wilderness area that currently meets criteria for potential wilderness to no longer meet those criteria and thus not be evaluated for possible wilderness recommendation during future forest planning.

Preliminary Administratively Recommended Wilderness Areas

The February 2014 Draft and June 2018 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests Revised Land Management Plans (USDA Forest Service 2014 and 2018c) identified two preliminary administratively recommended wilderness areas on the Malheur National Forest. Neither of these areas are within or directly adjacent to the Cliff Knox planning area.

Because there are no preliminary administratively recommended wilderness areas in the Cliff Knox planning area there would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to them.

Environmental Consequences

Methodology

A GIS analysis was performed that overlaid proposed treatments within the potential wilderness boundary.

Spatial and Temporal Context for Effects Analysis

The cumulative effects analysis boundary for potential wilderness areas is the full extent of that area, approximately 5,790 acres. Refer to Figure 1. The temporal scale for potential wilderness would be approximately 10-20 years, or as long as it takes for all proposed projects to be implemented.

Past, Present, and Foreseeable Activities Relevant to Cumulative Effects Analysis

Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities that are relevant to this resource are displayed in the Cliff Knox Final Environmental Impact Statement, Appendix D.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

By definition, direct and indirect effects (40 CFR 1508.8), and cumulative effects (40 CFR 1508.7) result from the proposed action, and thus are not germane to the No Action alternative.

Under the No Action alternative there would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to potential wilderness areas because no activities would occur in these areas. The affected environment would remain unchanged, except by natural processes and ongoing management activities.

Consequences of No Action may occur because the landscape would continue developing complex fuel loads. A wildfire may burn more extensively and kill more trees within timbered stringers in grass/tree mosaic. There would be more dramatic impacts (more acres turned black) to visual quality caused by a wildfire compared to a prescribed fire, however, it would be a natural occurrence, an expected condition of the landscape and would not adversely affect the eligibility of these lands as potential wilderness and thus the area could still be evaluated for possible wilderness recommendation during future forest planning.

Alternatives 2 and 3 – Action Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Effects

Table 1 is a summary showing the proposed treatments and acres by alternative in the Malheur River Potential Wilderness area within the Cliff Knox planning area.

Table 1. Acres and types of treatments by alternative in the Malheur River Potential Wilderness area

Proposed treatment types	Alternative 1 – no action	Alternative 2	Alternative 3
Non-commercial treatment	0	1,380	900
Prescribed burning	0	5,790	850
Unplanned ignitions	0	5,790	5,790

Under the action alternatives, non-commercial vegetation treatment activities would occur on approximately 1,380 acres within potential wilderness areas under alternative 2 and 900 acres

under alternative 3. Non-commercial treatments would thin by hand generally small diameter trees (no larger than 9 inches diameter at breast height). Created slash would be hand piled and burned. No heavy equipment would be used in proposed treatment units; implementation would be by hand only. Prescribed burning would occur under the action alternatives (Alternative 2 and 3) on approximately 5,790 and 850 acres, respectively. Both alternatives propose management of unplanned ignitions on 5,790 acres. No other treatments are proposed within the potential wilderness boundary.

The proposed activities would not adversely affect the eligibility of these lands as potential wilderness and thus the area could still be evaluated for possible wilderness recommendation during future forest planning. Felling of generally small diameter trees and prescribed burning or managing unplanned ignitions would not cause the area to no longer meet criteria for potential wilderness. Because these activities would not cause the area to no longer meet criteria for potential wilderness there would be no direct, indirect or cumulative effects to potential wilderness.

The effects to scenery, visuals, recreation, vegetation, fire, fuels, and air quality of proposed activities within potential wilderness areas are described in those resource sections of the Cliff Knox Final Environmental Impact Statement, and not reiterated here.

Cumulative Effects

Reasonably foreseeable future actions include:

- A slash barrier and about 200 feet of 4-strand barbed wire fence authorized in the Central Malheur Allotment Project environmental assessment and decision notice.
- Future actions authorized under the Malheur National Forest Aquatic Restoration Decision in the Cliff Knox planning area (Appendix D, Table D-2).

These reasonably foreseeable future actions would not affect the eligibility of the Malheur River potential wilderness area because no harvesting or road building are proposed. Because the Cliff Knox proposed activities would also not adversely affect the eligibility of these lands as potential wilderness there would be no cumulative effects to the eligibility of potential wilderness and evaluation for possible wilderness recommendation could occur in future forest planning.

Compliance with Forest Plan and Other Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies and Plans

Potential wilderness areas in the Cliff Knox planning area were identified in the February 2014 Draft and June 2018 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests Revised Land Management Plans (USDA Forest Service 2014 and 2018c), following Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 chapter 70. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not adversely affect the eligibility of these lands to be designated as wilderness in the future.

Figure 1. Malheur River inventoried roadless and potential wilderness areas

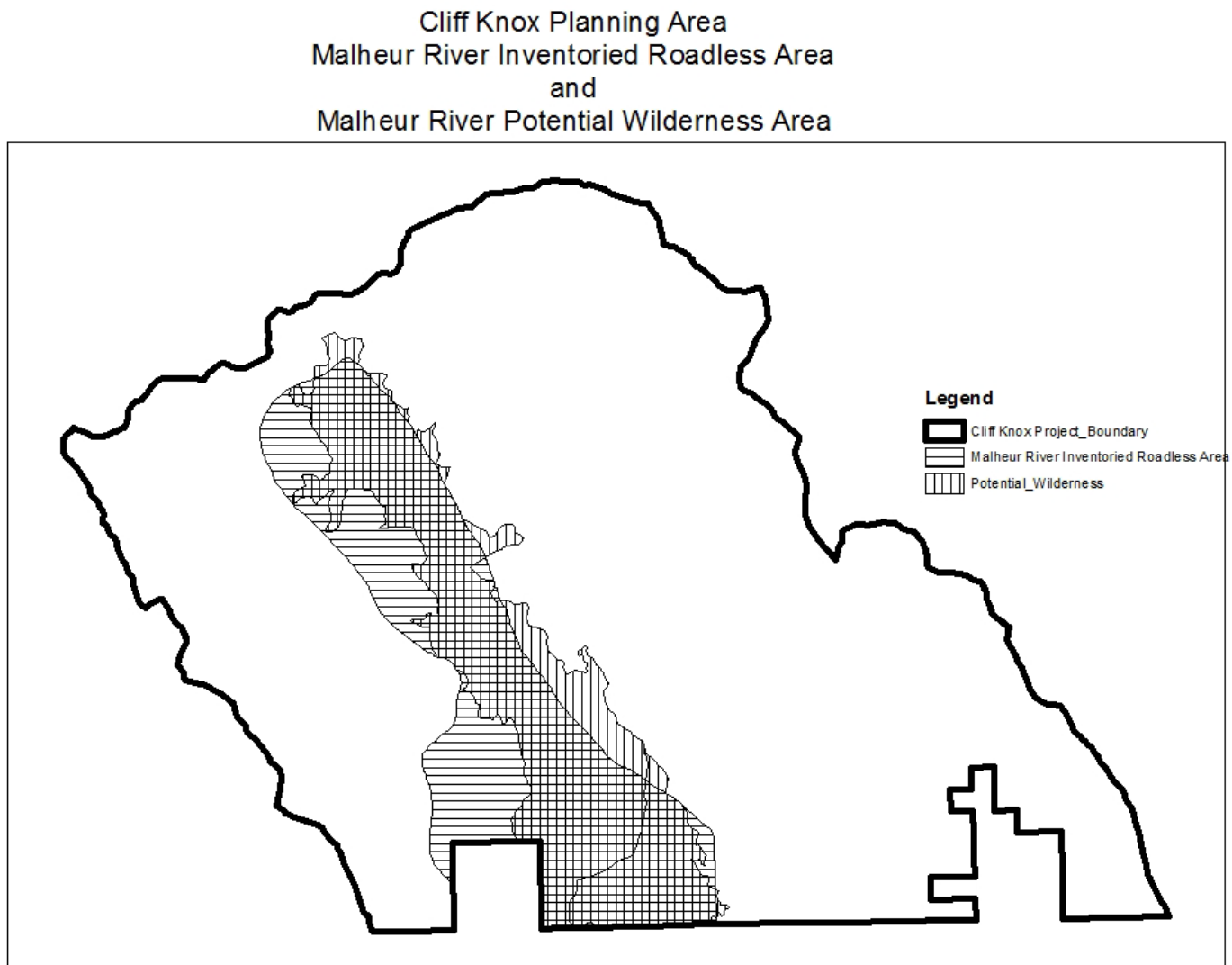


Figure 2. Alternative 2 within the Malheur River potential wilderness area

Cliff Knox Planning Area
Alternative 2 within
Malheur River Potential Wilderness Area

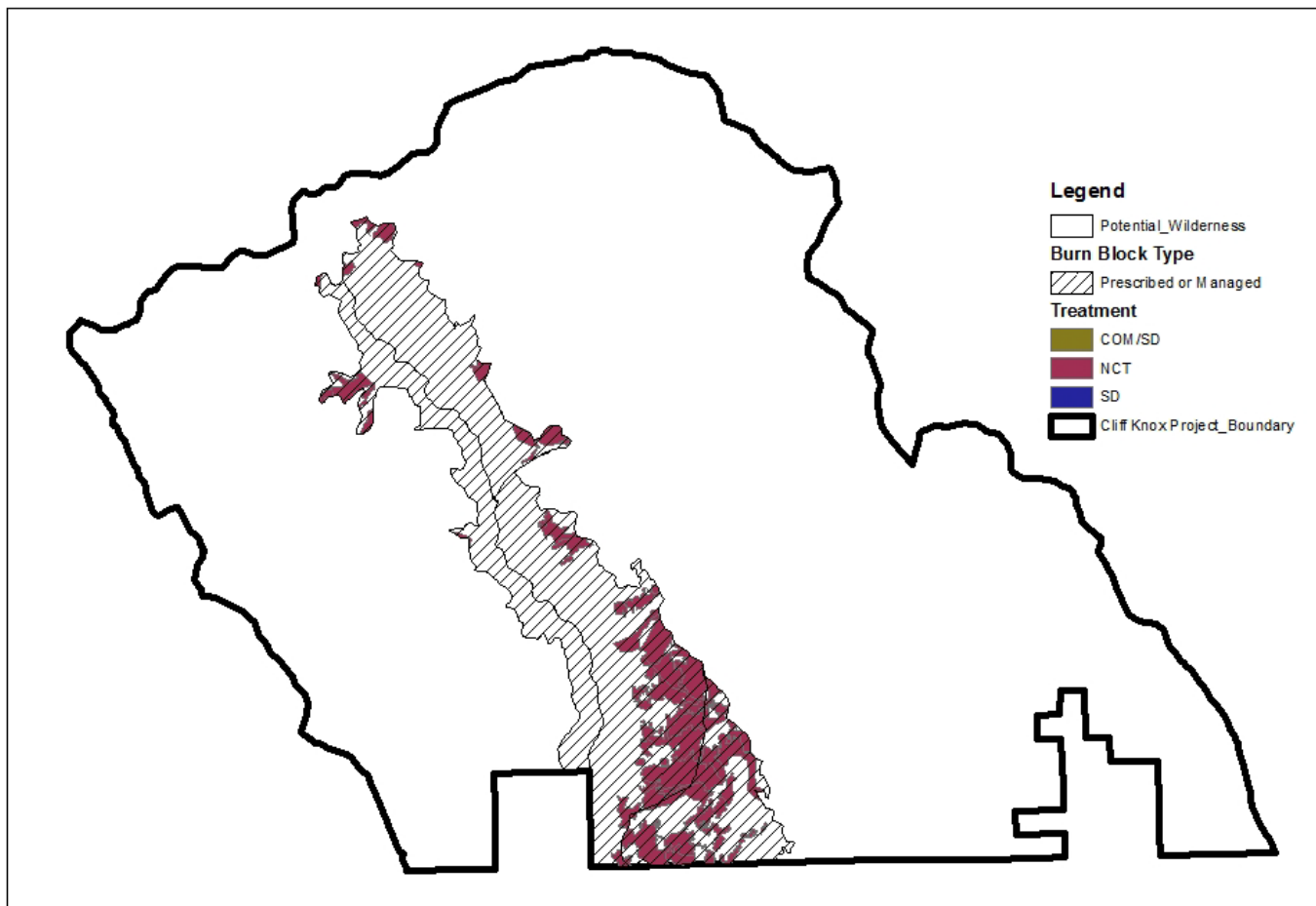


Figure 3. Alternative 3 within the Malheur River potential wilderness area

Cliff Knox Planning Area
Alternative 3 within
Malheur River Potential Wilderness Area

