

AMENDMENT FOR NEPA COVERAGE FOR  
GRAZING AND NOXIOUS WEED CONTROL MEASURES  
ELK CREEK PROJECT  
JACKSON COUNTY, OREGON

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for Grazing and Noxious Weed Control Measures at the Elk Creek Project, Jackson County, Oregon and a Finding of No Significant Impact was signed, dated March 29, 2002. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Elk Creek project land encompasses 3,502 acres, approximately evenly distributed west and east of Elk Creek. Elk Creek flows south through the property and is a tributary of the Rogue River. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issues grazing leases for the Flat Creek allotment west of Elk Creek and the Lost Creek allotment east of Elk Creek. In 2002, the Corps proposed use of cattle in conjunction with other management prescriptions, including seeding and mowing, to control noxious weeds, notably yellow starthistle, on the property. In 2002, limited-duration grazing was allowed by yearly letter agreements between the Corps and cattle operators on Corps' land west and east of Elk Creek during spring, and seeding of heavily weed-infested areas with desirable plants took place west of Elk Creek in fall. The purpose of this amendment is to update the previous EA because of a planned reduction in cattle grazing for at least one year (2003) on Corps' Elk Creek project land. Also, for year 2003, the cattle release date will be April 15 (it was previously April 1) and all cattle will be off Corps' land by June 15. These actions will help reduce the risk of damage to riparian areas. The analysis in the EA and FONSI dated March 29, 2002 continues to remain applicable to the grazing and weed control actions to be undertaken at the Elk Creek Project.

A wildfire known as the Timbered Rock Fire burned 24,512 acres of land from July 13 through September 14, 2002, including 607 acres on Corps Elk Creek project land. Because of changes in range conditions resulting from the fire, BLM determined that grazing should be prohibited on the Flat Creek allotment (west of Elk Creek) for at least one year. Range conditions will be evaluated by BLM in 2004 and will determine if grazing on the Flat Creek allotment will be allowed in 2004. Grazing on the Lost Creek allotment (east of Elk Creek) would be allowed to continue, except that cattle released on that allotment will not be allowed west of Elk Creek (cattle from the Lost Creek allotment are known to occasionally stray west of Elk Creek in small numbers). For the year 2003, the Corps will, via letter agreement with cattle operators, prohibit all grazing on Corps' Elk Creek project land west of Elk Creek, with the possible exception of using cattle for weed management purposes in the summer or fall. Monitoring of weeds and planted species will continue on the west side of Elk Creek, and weed management actions such as mowing may occur. Cattle grazing east of Elk Creek will be allowed, but those cattle will be prohibited from grazing west of Elk Creek. The only cattle allowed to graze east of Elk Creek will be those cattle allowed to graze on the Lost Creek allotment. This action in allowing cattle grazing only on the east side of Elk Creek reduces the number of cattle grazing by 124 cows and eliminates cattle grazing near fish-bearing tributaries entering Elk Creek from the west.

To comply with the Endangered Species Act, a Biological Assessment was submitted to NOAA Fisheries on September 25, 2002 that addressed potential impacts of proposed grazing and noxious weed control measures on Southern Oregon / Northern California coho salmon. Because grazing will not occur on Elk Creek project land west of Elk Creek for at least one year, a revised Biological Assessment was submitted, dated February 25, 2003. The Corps concluded that the proposed grazing and noxious weed control measures may affect, but would not likely adversely affect the Southern Oregon / Northern California coho salmon.

For the reasons outlined in the March 29, 2002 FONSI, in addition to the decrease in environmental impacts as a result of reducing the amount of grazing allowed on Corps' project lands for the next two years, I have determined that the proposed action as modified at the Elk Creek project would have no significant impact on the environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. With this action, I am amending the previously issued EA dated March 29, 2002.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Richard W. Hobernicht  
Colonel, EN  
Commanding