

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission
February 20, 2014

Agenda Item: 3	Action
Subject: Grouse Mountain Ranch Acquisition – Final Order	
Presented by: Jim Morgan	

On July 17, 2013, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) approved the proposed OPRD 2013-15 Land Acquisition Priorities, and staff began moving forward with property acquisitions within the targeted initiative areas. Grouse Mountain Ranch was on the approved acquisition list. At the same time, Bandon Biota LLC submitted a proposal to OPRD outlining acquisition of a portion of Bandon State Natural Area (SNA) in exchange for other property and in-kind services. Grouse Mountain Ranch was identified as a possible element of a Bandon exchange.

Public input regarding the Grouse Mountain acquisition and the Bandon exchange proposal was provided at the July meeting; at one public meeting in Bandon; and at one public meeting in Mount Vernon (nearest community to Grouse Mountain). In addition, public comment was taken at Commission meetings on September 24, 2013, November 20, 2013, February 5, 2014, and through open solicitation via mail, e-mail, OPRD's website, and social media.

At the February 5, 2014 meeting, the Commission tabled action on the proposal pending its further review of the documents submitted at that meeting, and to give staff more time to negotiate an intergovernmental agreement with Grant County addressing their concerns over continued agricultural use of the property and the possible effects of the acquisition on local government finances.

With the support of the Department of Justice, the department has updated the final proposed order regarding the Grouse Mountain Ranch acquisition presented at the February 5, 2015 meeting. The revised order is attached as Exhibit A for the Commission's consideration for approval. Two other exhibits (B and C) presented at the February 5, 2014 meeting are re-attached here, but have not changed since that meeting. As of February 14, 2014, an agreement with Grant County was still under negotiation.

Attached Exhibits:

- A – Proposed Final Order: Grouse Mt Ranch Acquisition (clean and marked up)
- B – Preliminary Management Concepts
- C – Natural Resource Values
- D – Public comment received between Feb. 5-14.

Prior Action by the Commission:

- July 17, 2013 – Approved 2013-15 Acquisition Priorities
- Nov. 20, 2013 – Finds that Grouse Mt Acquisition meets OAR 736-019-0060 and instructs the OPRD to prepare a proposed final order.
- Feb. 5, 2014 – Tabled Grouse Mt. agenda item pending review of documents.

Action Requested:

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt the revised final order in Exhibit A.

Prepared by: Jim Morgan

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission
February 20, 2014

Agenda Item: 3

Action

Subject: Grouse Mountain Ranch Acquisition – Final Order

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Exhibit A

**Proposed Final Order: Grouse Mt Ranch Acquisition
(clean and marked up)**

**BEFORE THE
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF OREGON**

IN THE MATTER OF THE)	APPROVAL
GROUSE MOUNTAIN RANCH)	ORDER
ACQUISITION)	14-01

This matter came before the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission (the “Commission”) on February 5, 2014 and February 20, 2014, as a proposed acquisition of certain real property in Grant County commonly known as Grouse Mountain Ranch (“Grouse Mountain Ranch”), pursuant to ORS 390.112, ORS 390.121 and ORS 390.122, and OAR chapter 736, division 19. The proposal before the Commission concerns the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch by the Department for \$4,000,000, pursuant to the terms of the PSA (as defined below).

The Commission fully considered the proposed acquisition, the oral and written comments of the public and the reports of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (the “Department”). The Commission makes the following findings of fact, conclusions of law and decision -- hereby approving the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch by the Department for \$4,000,000, pursuant to the terms of the PSA.

I. History

ORS 390.010 establishes the State policy on outdoor recreation resources, including the provision of opportunities to meet growing needs. Further, the Commission is instructed to encourage public nominations of significant resources for acquisition as parks. ORS 390.122. The Department therefore was interested in hearing from George Meredith (on behalf of himself and his wife Priscilla) when they approached the Department on March 29, 2012, about a possible sale of Grouse Mountain Ranch, an approximately 6,300 acre property in Eastern Oregon.

The Department did its homework, visiting the property on several occasions and confirming its potential. The Department briefed the Commission about the possible opportunity in executive session on November 7, 2012, in Tillamook (on a confidential basis as part of a real estate negotiation pursuant to ORS 192.660(2)(e)). The Department staff report for the briefing stated:

The land is dominated by ponderosa pine forest in the upper elevation, descending to scattered juniper woodland and grassland communities, shrub lands, and valleys interspersed with perennial fish-bearing streams. While these landscape communities are not rare alone, collectively they provide representation of the larger surrounding landscape. Considerable restoration efforts by state, federal, and tribal agencies are occurring on the property.

The landscape form and large size offer a number of recreational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, horse-back riding, and camping with ample accessibility to John Day communities. The existing infrastructure is sufficient to make this a “turn-key park” with sufficient facilities and amenities for the public and park staff to utilize this property without significant investment.

On December 11, 2012, Grouse Mountain Ranch was first placed on an internal potential acquisitions list. Conversations between the Merediths and the Department continued over time, and the Commission continued to be briefed regularly in executive sessions. In March of 2013, the Department met with Judge Scott Myers of the Grant County Court (the governing body of Grant County) and disclosed the Department’s interest in acquiring the property.

As always, identifying funding was problematic. The Department let the Merediths know that they would likely need to split the transaction into two phases due to funding parameters – Phase I being the vast majority of the land (approximately 6100 acres) and Phase II being the remaining (approximately 200 acres) parcel on which the Merediths home is located. Meanwhile, as more fully described in the sister Bandon Exchange Order of this same date, the Department was communicating with Bandon Biota, LLC (“Biota”) about a possible Biota exchange request. The Department realized that looking at these two situations together could facilitate both of them -- by utilizing the acquisition of Phase I of Grouse Mountain Ranch as a component of a Bandon exchange. Once the Department recognized the possibility of combining the two potential transactions, it discussed the opportunity with the Commission in executive session on May 7, 2013, in Baker City.

Given time pressure on the potential transactions, the negotiations accelerated. Although incomplete, those negotiations reached a point where the Department deemed it appropriate to communicate about the opportunity at the next public Commission business meeting, rather than just in executive session. The matter of the Bandon exchange was placed on the agenda for the July Commission business meeting as an informational item, including the concept of

Biota providing, as part of an exchange, funding of \$2,500,000 for the Department to use to purchase Phase I of Grouse Mountain Ranch.

At the Commission's business meeting on July 17, 2013, in Coos Bay, the Department presented the matter and the Commission took public comment. Subsequently, the Department took additional public comment on August 16th in Bandon and August 19th in Mount Vernon. Also at the July business meeting, the Commission adopted its new Acquisition Priorities List for the 2013-15 biennium, which included both phases of Grouse Mountain Ranch. At the Commission's next business meeting on September 24, 2013, in Condon, the Department presented additional informational and the Commission took further public comment.

Traditionally, the acquisition of property for park purposes and the creation of new parks have been perceived locally as a positive, or at least as benign. Some of the local residents, however, reacted negatively to the idea of making Grouse Mountain Ranch a part of the state park system. Many of the concerns raised were beyond the purview of the Department, as they addressed overarching policy issues about public and private land holdings and other unrelated matters. Given this developing political situation, the Governor's Office became involved. Working with all concerned, the Governor's Office identified a path towards resolution of the opponents' concerns through, among other things, certain potential commitments to the County by the Department going forward.

As negotiations between the Department and the Merediths continued, it became clear that certain contingencies in the Bandon exchange might delay the Phase I acquisition beyond the time frame desired by the Merediths. They therefore proposed financing the transaction themselves. With seller financing (100% and no interest), it became possible for the Department to acquire the entire property at once rather than in phases (and to do so prior to consummation of the Bandon exchange); the deal was restructured accordingly.

On November 8, 2013, the Department and the Merediths¹ executed a Purchase and Sale Agreement, as amended to adjust the amount the Department will pay for Grouse Mountain Ranch² (the "PSA"), subject to Commission

¹ The Merediths executed the PSA as "W. George Meredith and Priscilla M. Meredith, as Co-Trustees of the W. George Meredith Revocable Trust U/T/A dated February 1, 2007, as to an undivided one-half (1/2) interest, and Priscilla M. Meredith and W. George Meredith, as Co-Trustees of the Priscilla M. Meredith Revocable Trust U/T/A dated February 1, 2007, as to an undivided one-half (1/2) interest, as tenants in common."

² On February 5, 2014, the Merediths agreed to reduce the "Property Payment Amount," which is the amount the Department will pay under the PSA, from \$4,500,000 to

approval. On November 14, 2013, the Department deposited \$10,000 earnest money in escrow, as required by the terms of the PSA.

This restructuring of the deal also affected its procedural stance in front of the Commission, requiring it to be disconnected from the Bandon exchange and addressed separately. At the Commission's business meeting on November 20, 2013, in Corvallis, the Department presented information about the restructuring and the new procedural posture, and took further public comment. A letter from the Governor was received that suggested commitments the Department might make (as negotiated by the Governor's Office) in response to the political situation. Two of the three members of the Grant County Court (in their comments and upon questioning by the Commission) expressed a willingness to work with the Department to define and memorialize those commitments. Those commitments are not addressed in this Order.

On November 20, 2013, the Commission passed a motion finding that the Grouse Mountain Ranch acquisition meets the acquisition criteria and instructed the Department to prepare a proposed final order for Commission approval.

II. Facts and Findings

The Commission notes that many of the applicable criteria address or contain similar or related concepts. In the interest of brevity (as well as organization), the Commission does not reiterate relevant facts for each criteria. Instead, the Commission has sought to mention them where they seem most apt, but intends that all facts in this Order be applied to all criteria, as applicable.

The Commission also notes, as a general matter, with respect to all the criteria, that the acquisition process is only the first step in a much larger process that the Department engages in to create a new state park. In order to make its acquisition decision, the Department performs preliminary site scoping and due diligence for potential uses of the property. If a property is then acquired, the Department undertakes a comprehensive master planning process (with a significant public input and review component). Ultimately, the Department seeks plan approval from the Commission and the approved plan is submitted to the local governing body for its approval.

\$4,000,000, and to donate the \$550,000 difference between the Property Payment Amount and the \$4,550,000 "Property Purchase Price."

The foregoing is by way of acknowledging that the acquisition decision, like any real estate transaction, is by nature speculative and based on incomplete information. The subsequent steps provide for additional, appropriate process prior to transforming a purchase into a park.

The Commission is authorized by statute to acquire new park and recreation areas. ORS 390.112, ORS 390.121 and ORS 390.122. Specifically, ORS 390.121(1) authorizes the Commission to:

Acquire by purchase . . . real property or any right or interest therein deemed necessary for the operation and development of state parks, roads, trails, campgrounds, picnic areas, boat ramps, nature study areas, waysides, relaxation areas, visitor and interpretive centers, department management facilities, such as shops, equipment sheds, office buildings, park ranger residences or other real property or any right or interest because of its natural, scenic, cultural, historic or recreational value, or any other places of attraction and scenic or historic value which in the judgment of the State Parks and Recreation Department will contribute to the general welfare, enjoyment and pleasure of the public.

In addition, pursuant to ORS 390.112, ORS 390.121 and ORS 390.122, the Commission's evaluation of properties for possible acquisition shall include, in relevant part, the consideration of opportunities that may be lost to the Department if acquisition is delayed.

These factors are reiterated in the acquisition criteria set forth in OAR chapter 736, division 19, which establishes certain policies, criteria and practices relating to the acquisition of real property, which in relevant part are more particularly discussed below.

OAR 736-019-0060(1)(a) requires the Department to maintain a list of real properties and areas of interest, and authorizes the Department to acquire properties on the list as they become available.

The Department prepared, and the Commission adopted, the Department's 2013-15 Land Acquisition Priorities list (the "Acquisition Priorities List") on July 17, 2013, which included both phases of Grouse Mountain Ranch. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(1)(a).

OAR 736-019-0060(2): The Department's acquisition of real property must meet *one* of the criteria set forth in OAR 736-019-0060(2), which includes serving the Department's purposes and the public's interest by doing the following:

OAR 736-019-0060(2)(a) - protecting areas of outstanding natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational significance for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations

OAR 736-019-0060(2)(e) - addressing opportunities that may be lost to the Department if acquisition is delayed

There are myriad examples in the record of how these criteria are met. Some of the more significant ones are set forth below:

- “[N]o other park in the system provides as complete of a combination of diverse habitats within an accessible context that is well-suited to back-country recreation and enjoyment.” (“Vegetation and Habitat of Grouse Mt. Property: An OPRD Assessment of Natural Resource Values,” p. 19, Department’s website³)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch “provides ample representation of natural features that characterize the region, including geologic features, the variety of plant communities, the rich wildlife habitat, and the scenic vistas” that attract visitors to the region. (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch is comprised of Ponderosa pine forest, bunchgrass prairie, and riparian bottomlands. Beech Creek, a tributary of the John Day River, and other streams on the property provide salmonid habitat. (Department’s November 20 Staff Report, Ex. A, p. 2, Department’s website)
- The Merediths have performed substantial restoration work on Grouse Mountain Ranch, including the discontinuation of grazing, the exclusion of livestock from the creeks, conversion of some of the bottomlands to wildlife forage, fuels reduction thinning and reclaiming Beech Creek floodplain. (“Vegetation and Habitat of Grouse Mt. Property: An OPRD Assessment of Natural Resource Values,” p. 17, Department’s website)

³ In this report, Grouse Mountain Ranch was compared to current Department properties on the basis of scenic quality, topographic variation, potential back-country experience and habitat diversity.

This restoration work has advanced the natural and scenic significance of Grouse Mountain Ranch.

- Grouse Mountain Ranch will provide opportunities for interpretation of local cultural as well as educational programs accessible to a wide range of users. (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch includes a historic log cabin that was constructed around 1868 by Andrew Anderson, a Swedish immigrant. The cabin may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, a significant amount of information about the cabin is available through Anderson’s descendants, which will provide a strong foundation on which to develop the necessary historical narrative for a National Register nomination, as well as cultural and historical interpretation opportunities for visitors to Grouse Mountain Ranch.
- Grouse Mountain Ranch contains two archaeological sites on what is part of the ceded lands of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, as well as the aboriginal territory of the Burns Paiute Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. A BLM inholding near the center of the property also contains a protected archaeological site.
- Based on recreational surveys in the region, and the landscape and existing facilities, the Department has identified potential recreational uses for Grouse Mountain Ranch “that include camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife-viewing, fishing, environmental education, and agricultural uses.” (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- The region in which Grouse Mountain Ranch is located shows a need for drive-in tent sites and soft surface trails in the region that includes Grant County. (Oregon Resident Outdoor Recreation Demand Analysis – SCOPR Planning Region 10 Summary, Nov. 12, 2012, pp. 5, 6) Grouse Mountain Ranch has the potential to provide drive-in tent sites and soft surface trails. (Map: “Grouse Mountain Acquisition - Existing Facilities & Potential Park Uses”)
- The Department has not identified any other similar properties and is not aware of any willing seller of same.
- The PSA includes a June 30, 2014 closing date. If the transaction is not timely closed, this opportunity may be lost.

- The appraised value of Grouse Mountain Ranch is \$4,550,000, which is greater than the \$4,000,000 amount that the Department will pay under the PSA. Pursuant to the PSA, the sale by the Merediths includes a charitable donation to the Department in the amount of \$550,000, the difference between the appraisal amount and what the Department will pay. The sale by the Merediths also will include the donation of approximately \$150,000 worth of agricultural equipment that is now located on Grouse Mountain Ranch. If the transaction is not timely closed, the Department will lose the opportunity to benefit from this approximately \$700,000 charitable donation.

While the Department’s acquisition of real property must meet one of the criteria set forth in OAR 736-019-0060(2), based on the above it in fact meets many of the criteria. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(2).

OAR 736-019-0060(3) requires that the acquisition of real property:

be “consistent with the Department’s purpose and its long range planning goals”; and

be prioritized through a rating system that evaluates an acquisition’s significance “as it relates to the Department’s mission, development and operational costs, geographic distribution, diversity of values, public demand, and other factors connected to its feasibility as a state park.”

Department’s purpose and long-range planning goals. The Department’s purpose is, in relevant part, to implement the policy of the state with regard to outdoor recreation resources by supplying the outdoor recreation areas, facilities, and opportunities needed to meet growing needs. (ORS 390.010) The Commission has adopted the overarching 2008 Centennial Horizon plan, which contains the following long-term Department strategies, among others, relating to this purpose:

- “Secure outstanding habitats, historic places and scenic settings”
- “Protect important vistas, viewpoints, and scenery”
- “Acquire and restore marginal lands that have the potential to become special places”

- “Prioritize properties for State Park acquisition or development that serve as portals to Oregon’s significant recreation, cultural or scenic resources”

There are many examples in the record of how these strategies are met, including those already cited above, and in particular with regard to how Grouse Mountain Ranch’s unique location may allow it to serve as a portal to other resources, given that it is adjacent to Malheur National Forest.

Rating and evaluation system. In creating its Acquisition Priorities List, the Department analyzes potential acquisitions through a rating system that includes the factors set forth in OAR 736-019-0060(3). The rating system employs an Acquisition Evaluation Criteria form that considers those factors enumerated in OAR 736-019-0060(3) in the context of various provision the Commission has adopted in division 19, including the scope and purpose of OAR 736-019-0000, the policy of OAR 736-019-0040, and the criteria for acquisition and exchange in OAR 736-019-0060 and 736-019-0070. All of the rating system factors derive from the provisions of division 19. In its determination to include Grouse Mountain Ranch on the 2013-15 Acquisition Priorities List, and in the Commission’s adoption of that list, this criteria has been met.

The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(3).

OAR 736-019-0060(4) requires the Department to “look favorably at opportunities for acquisitions and exchanges that enhance the overall management of existing park lands.”

- Grouse Mountain Ranch can accommodate overflow camping demand from nearby Clyde Holliday State Recreation Site by providing camping sites. (Personal communication from Clyde Holliday Park Manager)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch has an office and an outbuilding that the Department may be able to integrate into Department operations in the region to allow for more efficient management and administration. (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- The existing infrastructure at Grouse Mountain Ranch may provide additional material and equipment storage space, repair facilities and management unit facilities for Department operations.

Since the above examples evidence such potential management enhancement, the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(4).

OAR 736-019-0040(4) states that the Department will aspire to “[b]alance the need for and benefits of public open space with impacts on local tax revenue and private economic opportunity.”

OAR 736-019-0040 is aspirational and therefore not a criteria. The Commission does not construe these aspirations to establish approval criterion. The aspirations provide guidance to the Department in conducting real property transactions. Nevertheless, the Commission acknowledges that “impacts on local tax revenue and private economic opportunity” have been raised in public comment. The Commission has considered these competing concerns, and has directed the Department to continue its good faith efforts to address these issues, among others, with the Grant County Court. By so directing the Department, the Commission has met the aspirational goal of balancing those interests. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0040(4).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(a), (b) and (i) require the Department to follow certain appraisal practices in its acquisition of real property.

An appraisal of Grouse Mountain Ranch has been completed in compliance with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(a), (b) and (i). The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(a), (b) and (i).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(c) requires the Department to “[c]onsult with local taxing entities of government when a land purchase has potential to cause a significant loss of property tax revenue.”

On March 12, 2013, when Department Director Tim Wood and Assistant Director John Potter met with Grant County Judge Scott Myers to convey the Department’s potential interest in acquiring Grouse Mountain Ranch, Judge Myers raised concerns over possible lost property tax revenue and revenue from other taxing districts, and the Department began considering how to address this issue. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(c).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(d) and (e) require the Department to “[s]eek to purchase from willing sellers as the preferred method of buying land,” and “[e]xercise the greatest of restraint in using the power of eminent domain consistent with the spirit and intent of the laws authorizing such power.”

The Merediths approached the Departments as willing sellers. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch does not include exercise of eminent domain power. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(d) and (e).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(f) requires the Department to make acquisitions of real property only with approval of the Commission.

The PSA between the Department and the Merediths is contingent upon Commission approval, pursuant to Section 3.1.3 of the PSA. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(f).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(g) authorizes the Director to pay up to \$10,000.00 as earnest money for the acquisition of real property.

The Department has deposited \$10,000 in escrow as earnest money, pursuant to Section 2.2 of the PSA. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(g).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(h) requires the Department to “utilize sound business principles in securing appraisals and conducting negotiations, and shall complete its due diligence in connection with all real property acquisitions and exchanges, including the request for and review of title searches, hazardous material assessments, agreements with third parties intended to facilitate an acquisition by the Department, and any other documents necessary to make the best decision regarding a land purchase or exchange.”

The Department has performed considerable due diligence to date, all in accordance with its standard practices and will continue to do so as contemplated by Section 3.1 of the PSA. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(h).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(l) requires the Department to “[c]onduct a visual inspection and check the records for historical uses of any land considered for acquisition. If either the visual inspection or historic records provide information the Department determines merits further investigation of environmental issues, the Department will engage in additional environmental review.”

The Department conducted visual inspections of Grouse Mountain Ranch in 2012 on June 7, July 31, and August 1; and in 2013 on March 11 and 12. Additionally, the Department has checked the records for historical uses of the property. The Department received information in the form of a public comment about a former asbestos mine in the area, and determined that the former asbestos mine is located on property adjacent to Grouse Mountain Ranch. The Department obtained information from the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries about the mine, which shows that it has been closed. The Department will, however, work with the appropriate agencies to ensure that the former asbestos mine does not interfere with anticipated park uses. The Department will also engage in further environmental review of Grouse Mountain Ranch as part of its ongoing due diligence as necessary. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(l).

III. Additional Findings and Conclusion

As described above, the applicable criteria have been met for the Commission’s approval of the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch. But there is no requirement that the Commission must approve an acquisition just because the criteria are met. Rather, the criteria help frame, inform and permit a subjective, discretionary decision that is the Commission’s to make. There are several reasons why the Commission is choosing to approve this particular acquisition that run as threads through and relate to many of the criteria, but they are worth stating on their own.

First, the Commission believes that there is real and significant value in preserving the thirteen years of thoughtful restoration work already done by the Merediths on the property, value to the State that might be lost if the Department does not acquire Grouse Mountain Ranch. In addition, that same restoration work is of value to the Department in jumpstarting the Department’s stewardship of the site. In addition to the value of the restoration work, the property also includes significant value in its existing infrastructure. The amount of funding necessary to implement a plan going forward (after the planning process and all necessary approvals) is likely to be manageable.

As noted earlier, the Department’s Land Acquisition and Exchange Rules (OAR 736-019) state that their purpose is to, among other things “[i]dentify and acquire the best representative landscapes...in Oregon.” The Commission recognizes that some members of the public have commented that this Grouse Mountain Ranch is not unique or special enough to be a state park. While the Commission does not share that sentiment, it does understand its mission to include the preservation of “representative landscapes” that may exist elsewhere today but that are not protected resources. The day may come when this property is actually unique, and at that time the public may be thankful for the Commission’s foresight.

This acquisition is about opportunity. The Merediths saw an opportunity for exceptional natural resource restoration. They recognized the Department as the logical choice for continuing that commitment as good stewards. The Department saw the opportunity to preserve and restore a place that encompasses the diversity of the surrounding unprotected landscape. The Commission sees a further opportunity in the near future – a destination state park that will contribute significantly to a developing critical mass of Eastern Oregon attractions that will help draw more people to the area.

For the reasons set forth above, the Commission hereby approves the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch by the Department for \$4,000,000, pursuant to the terms of the PSA.

DATED THIS ____ DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2014.

FOR THE COMMISSION:

Jay Graves, Chair
Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

NOTE: You may be entitled to judicial review of this order. Judicial review maybe obtained pursuant to ORS 183.484 by filling a petition for review within 60 days from the service of this final order.

Copies of all documents referenced in this order are available for review at the Department’s office in Salem (and are posted on the Department’s website).

The land is dominated by ponderosa pine forest in the upper elevation, descending to scattered juniper woodland and grassland communities, shrub lands, and valleys interspersed with perennial fish-bearing streams. While these landscape communities are not rare alone, collectively they provide representation of the larger surrounding landscape. Considerable restoration efforts by state, federal, and tribal agencies are occurring on the property.

The landscape form and large size offer a number of recreational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, horse-back riding, and camping with ample accessibility to John Day communities. The existing infrastructure is sufficient to make this a “turn-key park” with sufficient facilities and amenities for the public and park staff to utilize this property without significant investment.

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On November 20, 2013, the Commission passed a motion finding that the Grouse Mountain Ranch acquisition meets the acquisition criteria and instructed the Department to prepare a proposed final order for Commission approval.

II. Facts and Findings

The Commission notes that many of the applicable criteria address or contain similar or related concepts. In the interest of brevity (as well as organization), the Commission does not reiterate relevant facts for each criteria. Instead, the Commission has sought to mention them where they seem most apt, but intends that all facts in this Order be applied to all criteria, as applicable.

The Commission also notes, as a general matter, with respect to all the criteria, that the acquisition process is only the first step in a much larger process that the Department engages in to create a new state park. In order to make its acquisition decision, the Department performs preliminary site scoping and due diligence for potential uses of the property. If a property is then acquired, the Department undertakes a comprehensive master planning process (with a significant public input and review component). Ultimately, the Department seeks plan approval from the Commission and the approved plan is submitted to the local governing body for its approval.

The foregoing is by way of acknowledging that the acquisition decision, like any real estate transaction, is by nature speculative and based on incomplete

[\\$4,000,000, and to donate the \\$550,000 difference between the Property Payment Amount and the \\$4,550,000 “Property Purchase Price.”](#)

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information. The subsequent steps provide for additional, appropriate process prior to transforming a purchase into a park.

The Commission is authorized by statute to acquire new park and recreation areas. ORS 390.112, ORS 390.121 and ORS 390.122. Specifically, ORS 390.121(1) authorizes the Commission to:

Acquire by purchase . . . real property or any right or interest therein deemed necessary for the operation and development of state parks, roads, trails, campgrounds, picnic areas, boat ramps, nature study areas, waysides, relaxation areas, visitor and interpretive centers, department management facilities, such as shops, equipment sheds, office buildings, park ranger residences or other real property or any right or interest because of its natural, scenic, cultural, historic or recreational value, or any other places of attraction and scenic or historic value which in the judgment of the State Parks and Recreation Department will contribute to the general welfare, enjoyment and pleasure of the public.

In addition, pursuant to ORS 390.112, ORS 390.121 and ORS 390.122, the Commission's evaluation of properties for possible acquisition shall include, in relevant part, the consideration of opportunities that may be lost to the Department if acquisition is delayed.

These factors are reiterated in the acquisition criteria set forth in OAR chapter 736, division 19, which establishes certain policies, criteria and practices relating to the acquisition of real property, which in relevant part are more particularly discussed below.

OAR 736-019-0060(1)(a) requires the Department to maintain a list of real properties and areas of interest, and authorizes the Department to acquire properties on the list as they become available.

The Department prepared, and the Commission adopted, the Department's 2013-15 Land Acquisition Priorities list (the "Acquisition Priorities List") on July 17, 2013, which included both phases of Grouse Mountain Ranch. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(1)(a).

OAR 736-019-0060(2): The Department's acquisition of real property must meet *one* of the criteria set forth in OAR 736-019-0060(2), which includes serving the Department's purposes and the public's interest by doing the following:

OAR 736-019-0060(2)(a) - protecting areas of outstanding natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational significance for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations

OAR 736-019-0060(2)(e) - addressing opportunities that may be lost to the Department if acquisition is delayed

There are myriad examples in the record of how these criteria are met. Some of the more significant ones are set forth below:

- “[N]o other park in the system provides as complete of a combination of diverse habitats within an accessible context that is well-suited to back-country recreation and enjoyment.” (“Vegetation and Habitat of Grouse Mt. Property: An OPRD Assessment of Natural Resource Values,” p. 19, Department’s website³)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch “provides ample representation of natural features that characterize the region, including geologic features, the variety of plant communities, the rich wildlife habitat, and the scenic vistas” that attract visitors to the region. (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch is comprised of Ponderosa pine forest, bunchgrass prairie, and riparian bottomlands. Beech Creek, a tributary of the John Day River, and other streams on the property provide salmonid habitat. (Department’s November 20 Staff Report, Ex. A, p. 2, Department’s website)
- The Merediths have performed substantial restoration work on Grouse Mountain Ranch, including the discontinuation of grazing, the exclusion of livestock from the creeks, conversion of some of the bottomlands to wildlife forage, fuels reduction thinning and reclaiming Beech Creek floodplain. (“Vegetation and Habitat of Grouse Mt. Property: An OPRD Assessment of Natural Resource Values,” p. 17, Department’s website) This restoration work has advanced the natural and scenic significance of Grouse Mountain Ranch.

³ In this report, Grouse Mountain Ranch was compared to current Department properties on the basis of scenic quality, topographic variation, potential back-country experience and habitat diversity.

- Grouse Mountain Ranch will provide opportunities for interpretation of local cultural as well as educational programs accessible to a wide range of users. (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch includes a historic log cabin that was constructed around 1868 by Andrew Anderson, a Swedish immigrant. The cabin may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Additionally, a significant amount of information about the cabin is available through Anderson’s descendants, which will provide a strong foundation on which to develop the necessary historical narrative for a National Register nomination, as well as cultural and historical interpretation opportunities for visitors to Grouse Mountain Ranch.
- Grouse Mountain Ranch contains two archaeological sites on what is part of the ceded lands of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, as well as the aboriginal territory of the Burns Paiute Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. A BLM inholding near the center of the property also contains a protected archaeological site.
- Based on recreational surveys in the region, and the landscape and existing facilities, the Department has identified potential recreational uses for Grouse Mountain Ranch “that include camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife-viewing, fishing, environmental education, and agricultural uses.” (“Land Acquisition in Grant County,” p. 1, Department’s website)
- The region in which Grouse Mountain Ranch is located shows a need for drive-in tent sites and soft surface trails in the region that includes Grant County. (Oregon Resident Outdoor Recreation Demand Analysis – SCOPR Planning Region 10 Summary, Nov. 12, 2012, pp. 5, 6) Grouse Mountain Ranch has the potential to provide drive-in tent sites and soft surface trails. (Map: “Grouse Mountain Acquisition - Existing Facilities & Potential Park Uses”)
- The Department has not identified any other similar properties and is not aware of any willing seller of same.
- The PSA includes a June 30, 2014 closing date. If the transaction is not timely closed, this opportunity may be lost.
- The appraised value of Grouse Mountain Ranch is \$4,550,000, which is greater than the \$4,000,000 amount that the Department will pay under the PSA. Pursuant to the PSA, the sale by the Merediths includes a charitable

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donation to the Department in the amount of \$550,000, the difference between the appraisal amount and what the Department will pay. The sale by the Merediths also will include the donation of approximately \$150,000 worth of agricultural equipment that is now located on Grouse Mountain Ranch. If the transaction is not timely closed, the Department will lose the opportunity to benefit from this approximately \$700,000 charitable donation.

While the Department's acquisition of real property must meet one of the criteria set forth in OAR 736-019-0060(2), based on the above it in fact meets many of the criteria. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(2).

OAR 736-019-0060(3) requires that the acquisition of real property:

be "consistent with the Department's purpose and its long range planning goals"; and

be prioritized through a rating system that evaluates an acquisition's significance "as it relates to the Department's mission, development and operational costs, geographic distribution, diversity of values, public demand, and other factors connected to its feasibility as a state park."

Department's purpose and long-range planning goals. The Department's purpose is, in relevant part, to implement the policy of the state with regard to outdoor recreation resources by supplying the outdoor recreation areas, facilities, and opportunities needed to meet growing needs. (ORS 390.010) The Commission has adopted the overarching 2008 Centennial Horizon plan, which contains the following long-term Department strategies, among others, relating to this purpose:

- "Secure outstanding habitats, historic places and scenic settings"
- "Protect important vistas, viewpoints, and scenery"
- "Acquire and restore marginal lands that have the potential to become special places"
- "Prioritize properties for State Park acquisition or development that serve as portals to Oregon's significant recreation, cultural or scenic resources"

There are many examples in the record of how these strategies are met, including those already cited above, and in particular with regard to how Grouse Mountain Ranch's unique location may allow it to serve as a portal to other resources, given that it is adjacent to Malheur National Forest.

Rating and evaluation system. In creating its Acquisition Priorities List, the Department analyzes potential acquisitions through a rating system that includes the factors set forth in OAR 736-019-0060(3). The rating system employs an Acquisition Evaluation Criteria form that considers those factors enumerated in OAR 736-019-0060(3) in the context of various provision the Commission has adopted in division 19, including the scope and purpose of OAR 736-019-0000, the policy of OAR 736-019-0040, and the criteria for acquisition and exchange in OAR 736-019-0060 and 736-019-0070. All of the rating system factors derive from the provisions of division 19. In its determination to include Grouse Mountain Ranch on the 2013-15 Acquisition Priorities List, and in the Commission's adoption of that list, this criteria has been met.

The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(3).

OAR 736-019-0060(4) requires the Department to "look favorably at opportunities for acquisitions and exchanges that enhance the overall management of existing park lands."

- Grouse Mountain Ranch can accommodate overflow camping demand from nearby Clyde Holliday State Recreation Site by providing camping sites. (Personal communication from Clyde Holliday Park Manager)
- Grouse Mountain Ranch has an office and an outbuilding that the Department may be able to integrate into Department operations in the region to allow for more efficient management and administration. ("Land Acquisition in Grant County," p. 1, Department's website)
- The existing infrastructure at Grouse Mountain Ranch may provide additional material and equipment storage space, repair facilities and management unit facilities for Department operations.

Since the above examples evidence such potential management enhancement, the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0060(4).

OAR 736-019-0040(4) states that the Department will aspire to “[b]alance the need for and benefits of public open space with impacts on local tax revenue and private economic opportunity.”

OAR 736-019-0040 is aspirational and therefore not a criteria. The Commission does not construe these aspirations to establish approval criterion. The aspirations provide guidance to the Department in conducting real property transactions. Nevertheless, the Commission acknowledges that “impacts on local tax revenue and private economic opportunity” have been raised in public comment. The Commission has considered these competing concerns, and has directed the Department to continue its good faith efforts to address these issues, among others, with the Grant County Court. By so directing the Department, the Commission has met the aspirational goal of balancing those interests. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0040(4).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(a), (b) and (i) require the Department to follow certain appraisal practices in its acquisition of real property.

~~By the Commission’s February 5, 2014 meeting, an~~ An appraisal of Grouse Mountain Ranch ~~will have~~has been completed in compliance with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(a), (b) and (i). ~~By the Commission’s February 5, 2014 meeting, the~~ The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch ~~will comply~~complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(a), (b) and (i).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(c) requires the Department to “[c]onsult with local taxing entities of government when a land purchase has potential to cause a significant loss of property tax revenue.”

On March 12, 2013, when Department Director Tim Wood and Assistant Director John Potter met with Grant County Judge Scott Myers to convey the Department’s potential interest in acquiring Grouse Mountain Ranch, Judge Myers raised concerns over possible lost property tax revenue and revenue from other taxing districts, and the Department began considering how to address this issue. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(c).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(d) and (e) require the Department to “[s]eek to purchase from willing sellers as the preferred method of buying land,” and “[e]xercise the greatest of restraint in using the power of eminent domain consistent with the spirit and intent of the laws authorizing such power.”

The Merediths approached the Departments as willing sellers. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch does not include exercise of eminent domain power. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(d) and (e).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(f) requires the Department to make acquisitions of real property only with approval of the Commission.

The PSA between the Department and the Merediths is contingent upon Commission approval, pursuant to Section 3.1.3 of the PSA. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(f).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(g) authorizes the Director to pay up to \$10,000.00 as earnest money for the acquisition of real property.

The Department has deposited \$10,000 in escrow as earnest money, pursuant to Section 2.2 of the PSA. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(g).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(h) requires the Department to “utilize sound business principles in securing appraisals and conducting negotiations, and shall complete its due diligence in connection with all real property acquisitions and exchanges, including the request for and review of title searches, hazardous material assessments, agreements with third parties intended to facilitate an acquisition by the Department, and any other documents necessary to make the best decision regarding a land purchase or exchange.”

The Department has performed considerable due diligence to date, all in accordance with its standard practices and will continue to do so as contemplated by Section 3.1 of the PSA. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(h).

OAR 736-019-0100(1)(l) requires the Department to “[c]onduct a visual inspection and check the records for historical uses of any land considered for acquisition. If either the visual inspection or historic records provide information the Department determines merits further investigation of environmental issues, the Department will engage in additional environmental review.”

The Department conducted visual inspections of Grouse Mountain Ranch in 2012 on June 7, July 31, and August 1; and in 2013 on March 11 and 12. Additionally, the Department has checked the records for historical uses of the property. The Department received information in the form of a public comment about a former asbestos mine in the area, and determined that the former asbestos mine is located on property adjacent to Grouse Mountain Ranch. The Department obtained information from the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries about the mine, which shows that it has been closed. The Department will, however, work with the appropriate agencies to ensure that the former asbestos mine does not interfere with anticipated park uses. The Department will also engage in further environmental review of Grouse Mountain Ranch as part of its ongoing due diligence as necessary. The acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch complies with OAR 736-019-0100(1)(I).

III. Additional Findings and Conclusion

As described above, the applicable criteria have been met for the Commission's approval of the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch. But there is no requirement that the Commission must approve an acquisition just because the criteria are met. Rather, the criteria help frame, inform and permit a subjective, discretionary decision that is the Commission's to make. There are several reasons why the Commission is choosing to approve this particular acquisition that run as threads through and relate to many of the criteria, but they are worth stating on their own.

First, the Commission believes that there is real and significant value in preserving the thirteen years of thoughtful restoration work already done by the Merediths on the property, value to the State that might be lost if the Department does not acquire Grouse Mountain Ranch. In addition, that same restoration work is of value to the Department in jumpstarting the Department's stewardship of the site. In addition to the value of the restoration work, the property also includes significant value in its existing infrastructure. The amount of funding necessary to implement a plan going forward (after the planning process and all necessary approvals) is likely to be manageable.

As noted earlier, the Department's Land Acquisition and Exchange Rules (OAR 736-019) state that their purpose is to, among other things "[i]dentify and acquire the best representative landscapes...in Oregon." The Commission recognizes that some members of the public have commented that this Grouse Mountain Ranch is not unique or special enough to be a state park. While the Commission does not share that sentiment, it does understand its mission to include the preservation of "representative landscapes" that may exist elsewhere today but that are not protected resources. The day may come when this property

is actually unique, and at that time the public may be thankful for the Commission's foresight.

This acquisition is about opportunity. The Merediths saw an opportunity for exceptional natural resource restoration. They recognized the Department as the logical choice for continuing that commitment as good stewards. The Department saw the opportunity to preserve and restore a place that encompasses the diversity of the surrounding unprotected landscape. The Commission sees a further opportunity in the near future – a destination state park that will contribute significantly to a developing critical mass of Eastern Oregon attractions that will help draw more people to the area.

For the reasons set forth above, the Commission hereby approves the acquisition of Grouse Mountain Ranch by the Department for \$4,500,000 (or less if appraised for less) \$4,000,000, pursuant to the terms of the PSA.

DATED THIS _____ DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2014.

FOR THE COMMISSION:

Jay Graves, Chair
Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission

NOTE: You may be entitled to judicial review of this order. Judicial review maybe obtained pursuant to ORS 183.484 by filling a petition for review within 60 days from the service of this final order.

Copies of all documents referenced in this order are available for review at the Department's office in Salem (and are posted on the Department's website).

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Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission
February 20, 2014

Agenda Item: 3

Action

Subject: Grouse Mountain Ranch Acquisition – Final Order

Presented by: Jim Morgan

Exhibit B

Preliminary management concepts

Initial Values and Vision And Preliminary Management Concepts For Proposed Grouse Mountain Ranch Acquisition

PROPOSED ACQUISITION

Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department has the opportunity to complete the purchase of the 6,100 acre ranch in Grant County. The acquisition of this property will provide a large park that is comprised of ponderosa pine forest, bunchgrass prairie, and riparian bottomlands. It includes Beech Creek, a tributary of the John Day River, and other streams on the property that provide salmonid habitat. Based on assessments conducted to date, the property has high potential for providing significant natural resources, recreational, cultural and scenic value to the state park system. Existing infrastructure provides a basis for the future development of a state park at a regional and state-wide scale.

It is a very early stage in picturing a new state park in Grant County. However, it is important to start capturing initial ideas around what a new park would be all about. Local officials and citizens are weighing in on what they see as important about the potential for a park on the Grouse Mountain property. The initial vision and underlying values for establishing a new park are about the process and about its future use.

Process

- what are the shared values around the process of acquiring and planning a new state park?
- from a community perspective, what would an ideal result look like, if the process of acquiring and planning a new park was a success?

Future Use

- what is important for the future use of a new park?
- what would be an ideal story about the park sometime in the future?

PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS

Upon acquisition of the subject property, staff will engage the Commission in developing and refining preliminary management concepts for the property. Goals will be more fully developed as resource inventories and analyses are completed and the communities are engaged during the planning process. Preliminary management concepts and uses for the property are provided below.

Park Resources

desired result: a balanced approach to resource management is the foundation for planning long-term use of the park.

desired outcome (a): park resources on the property are well understood.

1. A biological and cultural resource survey of the property is completed first thing.
2. Rare, endangered, and other desirable species are identified for the property.
3. Higher quality habitats such as creeks, ponds, seeps, rare serpentine rock outcrops, and other significant components of the Blue Mountain ecoregion are identified and mapped.
4. Knowledgeable residents and neighbors are interviewed about the land use history, natural resources, cultural resources, and their concerns for the property.
5. Appropriate tribal representatives are consulted regarding the formulation of long-term cultural resource protection goals.
6. Sensitive and significant cultural sites, such as the 1875 Anderson cabin site, are identified.
7. All existing use, assets, and infrastructure are identified and mapped.
8. Significant and potential scenic viewpoints are identified and mapped.

desired outcome (b): the planned approach for park resources addresses community concerns.

1. Prescriptions are developed to limit the potential for wildland fire on the property including active management of forests.
2. A fire response capability and protocol are worked out and agreed to with local communities, the Oregon Department of Forestry, and the U. S. Forest Service.
3. Prescriptions are developed to improve forest health including the removal of encroaching juniper and the commercial thinning of the ponderosa pine.
4. Prescriptions are developed to continue converting weed-infested areas to stable native plant communities.
5. A weed response action plan is developed to detect and suppress weeds before they become established in cooperation with the Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District and other partners.
6. Prescriptions are developed for boundary protection including the maintenance of fencing to avoid trespass.

desired outcome (c): the planned approach for park resources supports visitor experiences of statewide significance.

1. Plans to protect, improve, and highlight the significant natural features of the park are developed.
2. Plans to protect and encourage populations of rare, endangered, and other desirable species are developed with a full range of management tools and options.
3. Prescriptions are developed to restore and maintain quality riparian, shrub steppe, upland prairie, and high elevation ponderosa pine habitats representative of the region.
4. Prescriptions are developed to help interpret significant natural resources for visitors.
5. Prescriptions are developed to protect and enhance the existing water resources on the property.
6. Prescriptions are developed that afford quality views of the park interior, the Strawberry and Aldrich ranges, and the John Day valley.
7. The appropriate intensity of use for the natural settings is determined prior to the design of visitor experiences.
8. Plans anticipate potential for future growth in the John Day region with foresight to protect accessible, high quality natural resources that may become scarcer.
9. Plans to protect, improve, and highlight the significant cultural features of the park are developed.
10. The appropriate intensity of use for cultural resource protection areas is determined prior to the design of visitor experiences.
11. Plans to address the use or disposition of all existing assets and infrastructure are developed for the property.
12. Plans for any recreational development are limited and dispersed to generally maintain a natural setting as the predominant cultural and scenic experience.

Visitor Experiences

desired result: design and development of visitor experiences with statewide significance and draw.

desired outcome (a): the park is widely known for its educational experiences.

1. Plans for visitor learning opportunities are based on resource inventories, an evaluation of prospects for teaching outdoor skills, and incorporation of an appreciation for the history and lifestyle of Grant County.
2. The main lodge house is re-purposed to provide an exceptional day use experience for visitors as a research and education center.

3. Innovative educational programs are developed in conjunction with Eastern Oregon University with an emphasis on local teachers' needs as well as best management practices in timber, hydrology, recreation, and restoration.
4. Plans for a summer institute at the park are developed with Eastern Oregon University as an anchor educational use for facilities.
5. Demonstration forest management is evaluated as an outreach function for the park to show innovative approaches to resource stewardship.

desired outcome (b): plans developed for building the best destination public campground in eastern Oregon.

1. Surveys of potential visitors identify overnight characteristics that would draw people from a long distance to visit the park for multiple nights, and would extend the stays of visitors already drawn to other Grant County attractions.
2. Market research is completed to identify a unique mix of overnight amenities and characteristics for the park to make it stand out within the region.
3. Plans for overnight park facilities factor in resource considerations as well as market demand.
4. Appropriate camp and cabin sites with water, showers, and electricity are identified to serve as an overnight base of operations in accessing the park, surrounding federal lands, scenic bikeways, and other destination sites in the region.
5. One or more sites for innovative hike-in camping opportunities are identified.
6. Sites for easy-to-use equestrian camping with water, showers, electricity, corrals, and manure bins are identified.
7. Park design factors in energy use and conservation for sustainability and to minimize and offset both environmental and long-term cost impacts while in balance with providing the intended visitor experience.

desired outcome (c): plans developed for remarkable day use experiences worthy of a long trip to eastern Oregon.

1. Winter, summer, and shoulder season opportunities for park visitor day use activities are identified that would attract, engage, and extend visitor associations with the park, the region, and the park system.
2. Plans for park access from highway 395 include improved and expanded opportunities for day use facilities with parking and guidance for use of the property.
3. Plans for developing the property include opportunities for day use hiking, horseback riding, non-motorized biking, wildlife-viewing, fishing, and other similar experiences.

4. Half- and full-day trail experiences including connections to the Malheur National Forest are designed with unique and innovative trail features.
5. Visitor experiences are designed to make the beauty and diversity of the region accessible to novice outdoor recreation visitors who lack the confidence to explore the National Forest on their own.
6. Park design plans include ADA accessibility to the extent possible at all facilities including creek and pond access opportunities.
7. Concession opportunities are identified for activities like horseback riding, outdoor skills teaching, hunting guides, and food.

Community Interaction

desired result: the local community comes to believe the park to be a positive addition to the region.

desired outcome (a): Grant County commissioners find that state parks met commitments.

1. Lost tax revenue due to shift of land into public ownership is offset by contributions from state parks.
2. Ample and regular opportunities are provided during park planning to learn about the concerns, wishes, and reactions of local residents.
3. Local concerns and issues brought to the attention of state parks are addressed in a timely and complete manner.
4. Active management of visitor behavior through planning, design, operations, and strong boundary control helps protect neighboring private lands from trespass.
5. Land use decisions related to the park are agreed to by Grant County.
6. State parks are seen to be investing in the future of the John Day region by adding value in the form of building a new park and community profit center.

desired outcome (b): interim and long term use opportunities of particular interest to local communities.

1. Early interim trailhead access to the property is provided during the planning process.
2. Plans for the property identify sites that were designed to become special places where the local community can hold low impact events and their families can gather.
3. Plans provide access and support facilities to allow local people to pursue traditional activities including fishing, walking, riding, and a place to picnic.

4. Programming for the park provides an outdoor classroom experience for local school children.
5. Programming for the park includes visits by park rangers to local schools passing on their knowledge of the park.
6. Plans to locate park facilities and do landscaping improve scenic beauty from highway 395 and the John Day valley.

desired outcome (c): clear connections made between the park and the local economy.

1. Local businesses start using the park in their promotional materials to help showcase what makes the region such a special place.
2. Value-added products and services in the food, retail, service, and overnight accommodation sectors are developed as a direct result of visitation generated by the new park.
3. Good relationships between OPRD and the local chambers of commerce are established to promote the park.
4. Local jobs as rangers, guides, outfitters, resource workers, contractors, and caterers are generated by the new park.
5. An education partnership with Eastern Oregon University that leverages park resources is expanded to include the new park and make good use of the main lodge house as a research and education center.

Park Administration

desired result: adequate management resources identified to build and operate the new park.

desired outcome (a): interim park operations conducted well while comprehensive planning completed for the park.

1. The new park is opened on an interim basis in 2016 to the extent allowed under local land-use.
2. A comprehensive management plan, including master planning, is completed before December 2019.
3. Full operations are phased in during the early 2020s.

desired outcome (b): adequate interim and long-term operational resources dedicated to the new park to support effective operations.

1. Adequate staff resources are shifted to the park to oversee, inspect, and steward the land on a regular basis during the planning process.
2. Base annual stewardship funding in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 range is secured to steward and manage the property as responsibility transitions to OPRD.
3. Enhancement of natural resources on the property in conjunction with other resource agencies such as the Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and others are continued and strengthened.
4. Adequate construction funding for the new park from enhancement funds, grants, and donations is secured over time to gradually phase in development of the park.
5. Adequate dedicated staffing for the new park is secured over time through park system-wide realignments and new staffing requests.
6. Plans are developed to capture in the form of revenues or sponsorships enough of the value created by the new park to support day-to-day operations.

Possible Park Operations for a Phased Acquisition

The preliminary proposal is to continue operating the ranch in similar management practices as it is currently functioning. Operation of the 40 acres of bottomland along Beech Creek would continue in hay production utilizing current water rights and work with the local ranching community to assist with managing production and harvest. This will help offset some of the cost of operating and maintaining the park and buildings and provide some revenue (estimated \$4,000/yr.) until a comprehensive management plan is completed. For the remaining acreage, OPRD would continue the current landowner's efforts to restore native plant communities, and limit grazing on the property until more thorough site assessments are completed. OPRD would continue the current landowner's aggressive weed control efforts.

Phase 1: Land without the Main House and adjoining property

1. Establish a park office and maintenance shop at the existing office building/maintenance yard for base of operation. This would include park signage for entrance, boundaries, regulation, and trails. It will require shifting/transferring 1 permanent position in the MU/District/Region or other Regions to the park. An additional .5 FTE will be required to provide 7 day coverage during spring/summer/fall.
2. Establish the existing small house as park residence for on-site presence.
3. Develop a trail system, to create some basic visitor access to the property. Use established road/trails as base trail inventory.
4. Develop the 1st of two day use areas/trailheads to access trails (North & South). Most likely at the flat area near the small house/potential manager residence. This location could also provide equestrian parking as well. This would be north access.
5. Develop one of two identified existing flat open field areas in the bottomland (most southerly, next to office) into campground. An additional .5 FTE/1 position will be required to provide 7 day coverage during spring/summer/fall.

6. Develop 2nd of two day use areas/trailheads to access trails. Most likely at the flat area near Little Beech Creek. This could also serve the new trail development on the southerly property.
7. Develop some new trail on the southern part of the property with access from the campground first, and then expanding toward day use trailhead and future camping area.
8. Develop the area on East side of the highway, just south of the small house (identified as Winegar property addition) for bicycle camp, walk-in camping, group area, and cabins.
9. Develop the 2nd existing flat open field area (bottomland at Little Beech Creek) in the middle of the property to provide walk-in camping and possibly cabins.

Phase 2: Main House and adjoining property

Two options for use of the Main House and property around it have been identified: (1) a concession operation with the house serving as a lodge with meeting rooms and (2) the house being used as a visitor/interpretive/education center. A market analysis of the house and best potential use of this area would have to be conducted. The ample groundwater source for potable water supports all options discussed below. There are challenges to the either of the options given constraints of the narrow, steep entrance road.

1. Option 1: Convert the main house into a concession operation to provide lodging, possibly cabins and meal service for many functions, such as reservable public events, education classes, and recreation users such as equestrian, hiking, and non-motorized biking. It would require a commercial kitchen upgrade. This is the preferred choice as it would require minimal amount of park staff to operate/maintain and would move some operational costs to the concessionaire. Road will need significant improvements.
2. Option 2: Convert the main house into a visitor/interpretive/education center to provide service for many functions, such as reserved public events, education class rooms, and visitor/interpretation programs. It could also serve as a base for equestrian use. Additional park staff would be needed to operate, with OPRD paying for all operational costs. This would require an additional 1.5 FTE to 2 FTE to operate for seven days a week coverage seasonally, more for year round operation or if OPRD provides guided horse rentals. Road will need significant improvements.
3. Develop additional equestrian facilities with existing horse stables area for use with either option.
4. Develop camping for the equestrian use at lower elevation near the day use trailhead. This would switch over to Phase 1 if the Main House use is part of the purchase or delayed in development.
5. Install cabins for use with concession, equestrian use, education center, and provide alternative camping option at the park.
6. Develop some new trails on the northern part of the property with access from the equestrian/visitor center location. Also, link trails into the adjacent Forest Service trails.

Preliminary Financial Projections

Entire Park

Current statistics for similar size facilities in the region show 13,500 camper nights, and an estimated 175,000 visitors annually. Although it is difficult to precisely project revenue at this time from the operation of a state park at the current location, an existing state park in the county, Clyde Holliday which is located just 6 miles south, reported gross revenue in excess of \$78,000 last fiscal year (7/01/12 to 6/30/13).

A comparable campground operation at Clyde Holliday, with approximately 31 electrical camp sites realizes gross revenue of \$77,000 to \$83,000 annually. From this, and our experience operating campgrounds at Hilgard Junction, Red Bridge, and Ukiah-Dale, located just north, and Bates, located East, we project that the campground operation at Grouse Mountain could potential gross approximately \$75,000 annually if at least 35 electrical sites were installed. If primitive campsites are developed the revenue projection drops to \$7,500 for Ukiah-Dale to \$13,000 for a Hilgard Junction.

With most areas in the region providing free access, we do not see a day use fee being a viable option for revenue generation for the park at this time. Also, electrical service to the camping areas would have to be provided else campers will likely choose free camping on Forest Service property.

Concession/Visitor Center

For the Main House, fixed costs to keep this building open to the public, as a visitor/interpretive center including electricity/propane, telephone, water and sewer, totals an estimated \$8,000 per year. Building and grounds maintenance is estimated at an average of \$9,000 per year. This includes park staff time for identified tasks such as painting, road plowing/maintenance and misc. maintenance tasks on the house. A visitor/interpretive center would not generate the revenue to cover the cost of operations. The concession operation at Frenchglen Hotel generates OPRD \$20,000 annually with 8 rooms and food service. It grosses over \$300,000 annually. It is in an isolated location on the east side of the state, but the Steens Mountains and bird viewing attract visitors. If specific attraction can be developed such as wildlife viewing tours, horn hunting, and limited hunting to achieve wildlife management goals, a viable concession could possibly operate with other recreation use of the park. It may require OPRD to manage it for 3 or 4 years to establish use numbers and some revenue generation numbers before interest could be generated from possible concessionaires.

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission
February 20, 2014

Agenda Item: 3

Action

Subject: Grouse Mountain Ranch Acquisition – Final Order

Presented by: Jim Morgan

Exhibit C
Vegetation and Habitat

Vegetation and Habitat of Grouse Mtn. Property
An OPRD Assessment of Natural Resource Values

Noel Bacheller
October 4, 2012, with January 16, 2014 addendum

Introduction

George and Priscilla Meredith, owners of the subject property have approached OPRD with a concept of the OPRD acquisition of all or a portion of their property. In assessing this potential, Natural Resources and Planning staff made a site visit to the property in August of 2012. This report describes the habitat and environment of the property in broad terms, with attention to vegetation composition and general ecological setting.

Location and geographic description of the property

The subject property is located in rural Grant County, Oregon, straddling US highway 395 beginning approximately 1 mile NE of the town of Mount Vernon. The legal description of the property is T13S, R30E, Sections 1,2,11,12,13,14,15; T12S, R30E, Sections 25,35,36; T12S, R31E, Section 31; T13S, R31E, Sections 6,7,8,18. The property encompasses approximately 6524 acres of land.

In terms of landscape setting, the property encompasses low mountain peaks, ridges, broad slopes, incised canyons, and areas of broad, formerly agricultural bottomland. It spans the transition between open rangeland, woodlands, and relatively dense forests. It includes a perennial pond, several emergent marshes, several perennial creeks, numerous seasonal streams, and many springs. Elevation ranges from 2958 to 4830 feet above sea level, and topographic diversity is high. The property adjoins US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands over approximately 2 miles of its perimeter (6% of total perimeter). The remaining adjacent property is private.

Historic Vegetation and Sources of Change

Historic vegetation has been mapped and modeled by both the Oregon Biodiversity Information Center (ORBIC) and by the US Forest Service LANDFIRE project. The ORBIC data was mapped from surveyors' notes in the late 1800's at a relatively coarse scale. The LANDFIRE historic vegetation mapping was based on their Biophysical settings (BiOPS) modeling. Both datasets have their advantages and disadvantages. In the case of this particular property the LANDFIRE data is probably the better dataset. It is depicted in Figure 4, but it should be regarded as only coarsely accurate. A refined historic vegetation model could be created using the mapped current vegetation as a basis for suppositions of past vegetation. This approach would likely be more accurate, but this analysis is not within the scope of this assessment.

The types of vegetation that were present on the landscape prior to agricultural modification and fire suppression were ponderosa pine forest, juniper forest, riparian forest, big sagebrush steppe, rigid sagebrush steppe, bunchgrass prairie, aspen woodland and forest, emergent marshland, and serpentine barrens. All of these types are present on

the landscape today as well. The modeled extents of these cover types given by the LANDFIRE BiOPS model is probably erroneous in areas, particularly with regard to the extent of aspen forest. Big sagebrush steppe may also have been less prominent than is shown in the model.

Change in vegetation across the landscape is due to primarily past intensive grazing by domestic livestock, seeding of pastures to palatable livestock forage, hydrological modifications, weed introduction, and fire suppression.

- Livestock grazing has left abundant signs on the landscape particularly in areas of lower, flatter ground where livestock were present for more of the year. These areas have transitioned away from the former native bunchgrass communities to introduced and invasive grass species. Even forested areas show signs of grazing history in the species composition of the grasses present – which have transitioned to having areas of non-native bluegrasses common in “improved” pastures. Some areas of open meadowland are almost entirely composed of non-native grasses that have either been directly seeded, or have occurred because of overgrazing of native bunchgrasses and passive introduction of invasive non-native grasses.
- Hydrological modifications are evident in the Gordon Lakes area, where earthmoving was used to either increase the impoundment capacity of an existing wetland or pond; or, a new impoundment altogether may have been created from a former creek, seep, or spring. Bottomland riparian areas, particularly surrounding Beech creek, have likely been narrowed through either active channelization and conversion of bottomlands to pasture, by stream downcutting due to the influence of vegetation loss due to overgrazing, or by a combination of the two forces.
- Weeds usually occur in close association with livestock grazing and agriculture, and this property is no exception. Weeds present include North Africa grass, spotted knapweed, tumbledustards, cheatgrass, medusahead, teasel, scotch thistle, Canada thistle, and forage grasses. The grass weeds are the most widespread. North Africa grass’ abundance is quite high.

Figure 1. Vicinity Map

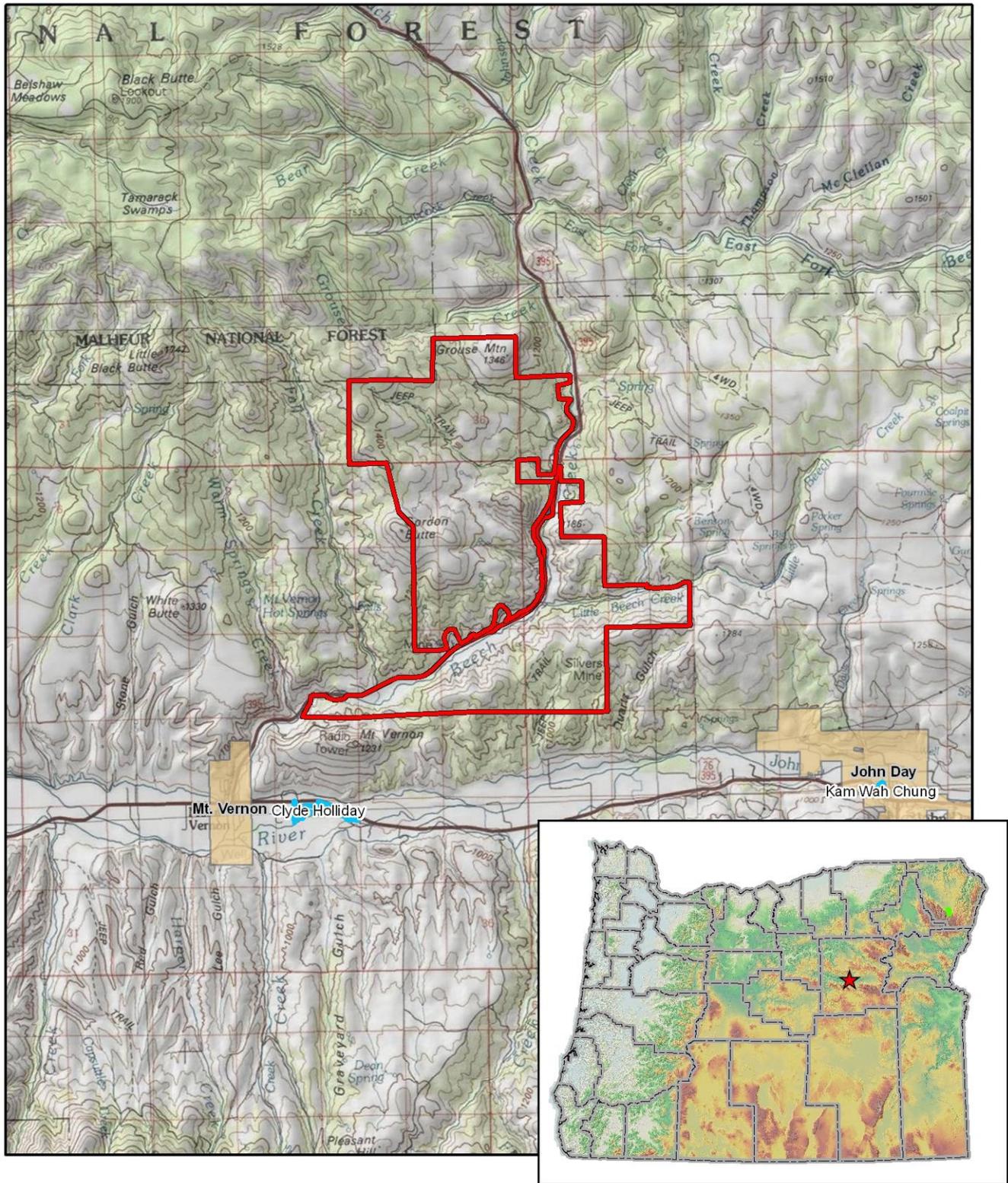


Figure 2. Topographic Setting

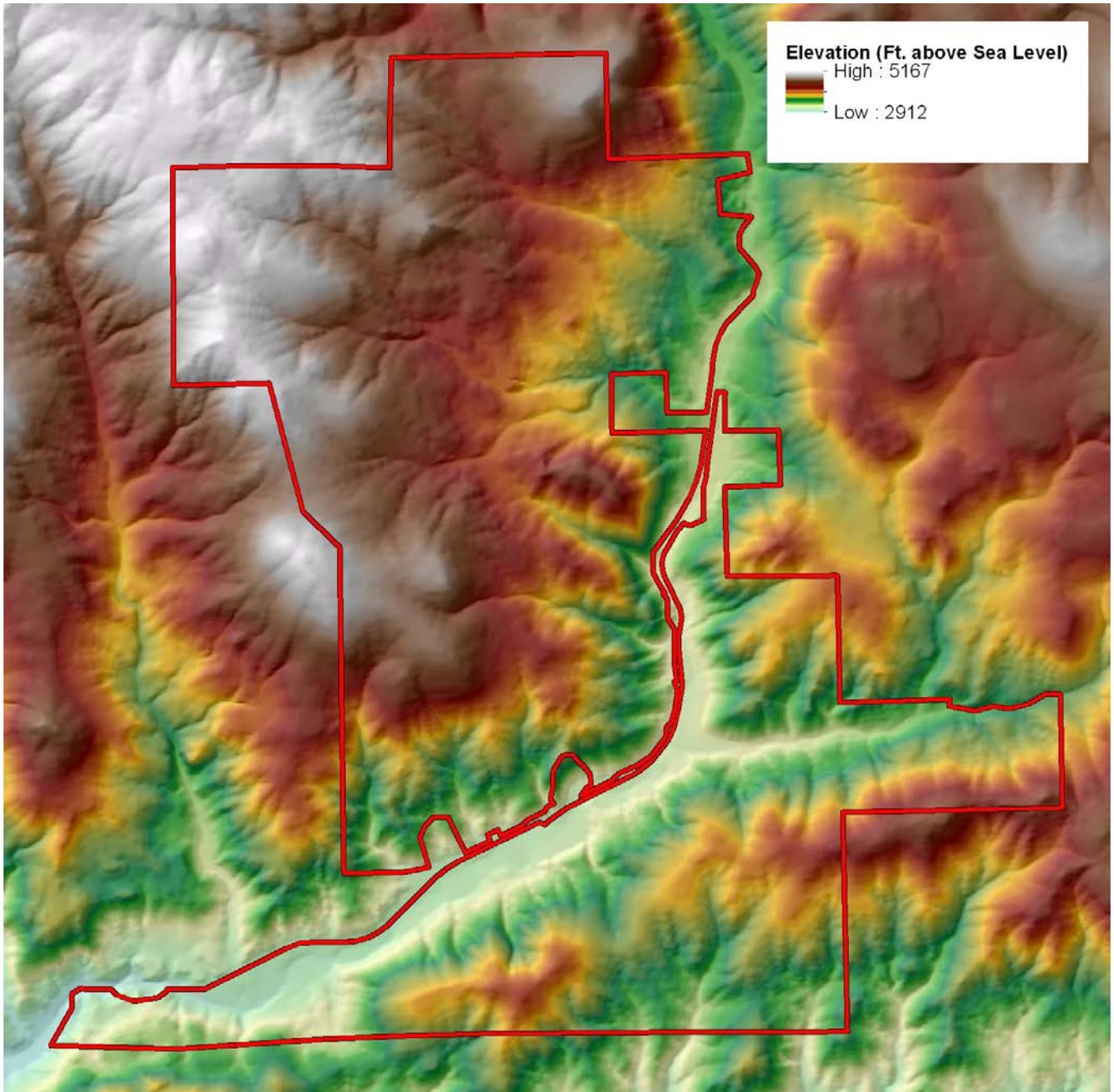
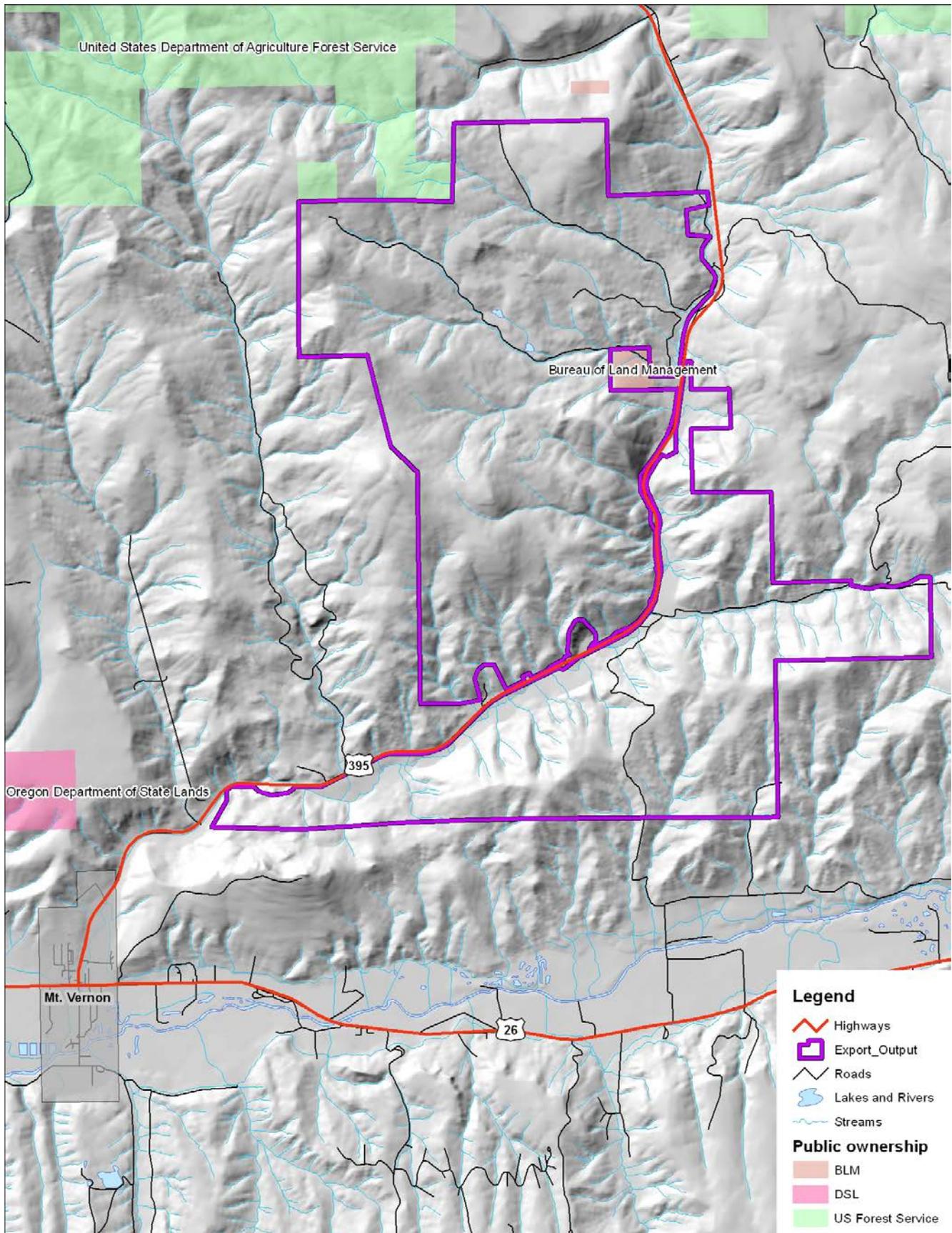


Figure 3. Landscape Settings



Current Vegetation and Landcover

Previously available current vegetation models for the site are mostly inadequate. The most accurate dataset available is the 2008 ORBIC GAP landcover data, but this dataset has some very significant inaccuracies. To improve upon available datasets, a number of plots were sampled in the field in the course of OPRD's August site-visit. A remote sensing process was undertaken to produce a more accurate model of current vegetation cover. The result is depicted in Figure 5. More work could be done to refine the detail and accuracy of the mapped vegetation types, but further work is beyond the scope of this preliminary assessment of the property.

The vegetation habitat types present on the property can be broken down into 7 main types for purposes of the general description of the site's ecology: upland forest, woodland, savanna, grassland, shrub-steppe, riparian vegetation, and agricultural/fallow. Each of these groupings and their subtypes are described in the paragraphs below.

Forests

The distribution of forests on the property is primarily dictated by moisture and topography. Trees generally grow most densely in draws, canyons, and on north slopes. Some juniper-dominated areas have reached forest-level tree densities in drier situations than those that are typically forested. This is due to juniper's ability to thrive in and colonize drier sites in the absence of fire. Forest subtypes include ponderosa pine forest, mixed coniferous forest, aspen forest, and juniper forest. The majority of the forest on the property is ponderosa pine forest. Lesser amounts of white/grand fir and douglas-fir are present in some pockets. Most forested plant associations are characterized by snowberry, woods rose, and rhizomatous bluegrasses. Some forested areas have sparse enough shrub layers such that elk sedge and pinegrass become dominant species. Where juniper is dense enough to be considered forest rather than woodland or savanna, it is generally underlain by weedy grasses, bitterbrush, and native bunchgrasses.

Woodlands

Woodlands are abundant on the property and are characterized by open stands of trees with less than 60% canopy cover. Woodlands on the property can be either predominantly western juniper or ponderosa pine. Bitterbrush, bunchgrasses, and weedy grasses are common inhabitants of the understory. The majority of the woodlands on the property are western juniper-dominated.

Savanna

Savanna habitat is that in which tree cover becomes sparse enough such that the habitat is essentially open grassland or shrub steppe with sparse individual trees or sporadic small clumps of trees. It is common in the drier portions of the property and in less fertile soils. Shrub and herbaceous vegetation is usually sagebrushes, rabbitbrush, bunchgrasses, a variety of forbs, and weedy grasses.

Figure 4. Historic Vegetation from the LANDFIRE Biophysical Settings Model

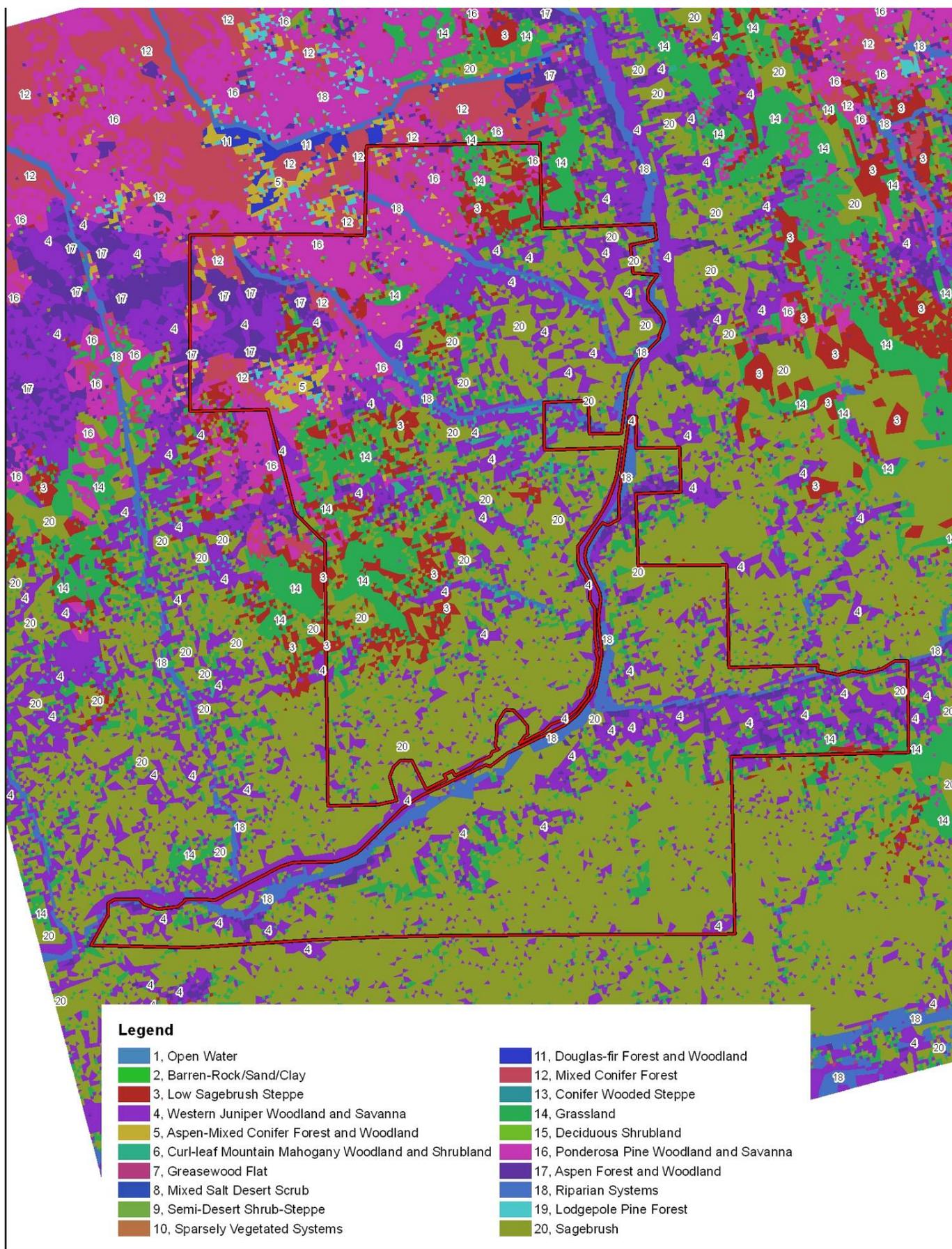
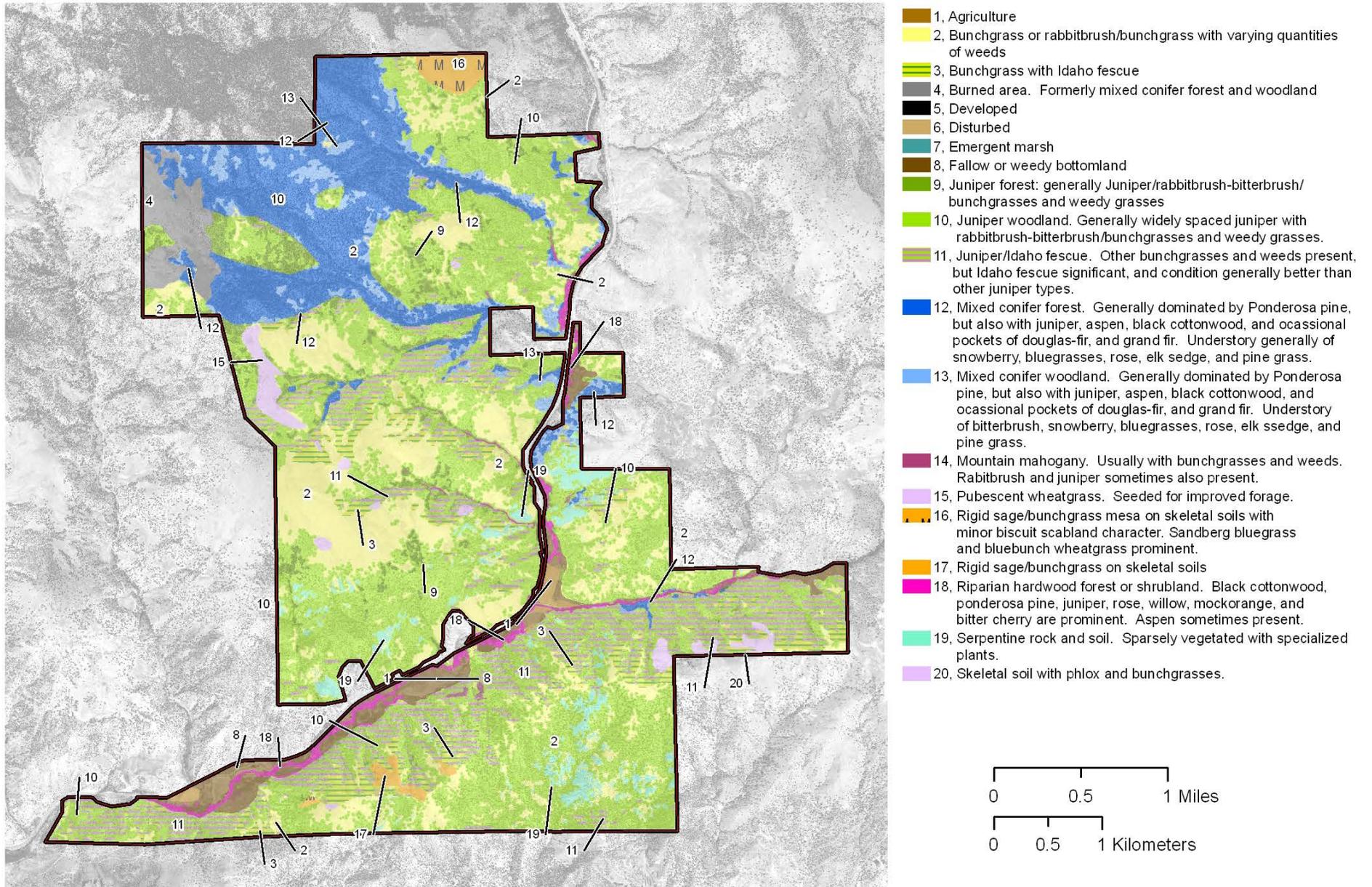


Figure 5. Current Vegetation based on August 2012 Site Visit



Grasslands

This type of habitat is widespread on the property and falls into several categories: Idaho fescue dominated bunchgrass, bluebunch wheatgrass-pine bluegrass dominated bunchgrass, weedy grassland, and improved pasture/haylot. Most grasslands in the higher elevations where livestock were mostly seasonally present are at least partially native bunchgrass. Some areas of longer livestock holding are almost entirely weedy. Areas that have been tilled and managed for hay or improved pasture are usually dominated by non-native forage grasses and weeds. Generally speaking, the Idaho fescue grasslands are present and in better condition on steeper, higher, and/or more remote north slopes with either no trees or sparse juniper. Bluebunch wheatgrass-pine bluegrass communities are likewise found on steeper, higher, and/or more remote slopes where livestock have not lingered as long – but in contrast to Idaho fescue communities, these occur on aspects other than north. The lower in elevation toward the bottomland one travels, the fewer native bunchgrasses are present.

Shrub-steppe

Shrub-steppe communities are characterized by low to medium sized shrubs scattered across the landscape with less than 60% cover. The shrub component is made up of either rubber rabbitbrush, big sagebrush, bitterbrush, or rigid sagebrush. The herb and forb composition beneath the shrub overstory is generally composed of native bunchgrasses, a variety of native and weedy forbs, and weedy grasses. These communities are less abundant than grasslands, woodlands, and forest on the subject property but they are still significant enough to note.

Riparian vegetation

Riparian vegetation on the property is generally made up of a complicated mixture of black cottonwood, aspen, ponderosa pine, and juniper as overstory trees; a midstory of shrubs that include willows, woods rose, chokecherry, snowberry, and golden current; and a forb layer that includes white sweetclover, blue wildrye, Kentucky bluegrass, basin wildrye, and thickspike wheatgrass. White sweetclover and Kentucky bluegrass are non-native forage species that are sometimes very invasive in these areas.

Agricultural/fallow

These areas are almost entirely in the bottomlands along Beech Creek and Little Beech Creek. There is one area in the higher ground that was seeded to pubescent wheatgrass that fits this description as well, although pubescent wheatgrass is a native species. Most of these areas are densely infested with non-native vegetation that includes weedy grasses, knapweed, scotch thistle, Canada thistle, tumble mustard, etc. Much of the arable land in the bottomland to the south of Beech Creek has been managed to transition it away from this weedy condition, and has been seeded in some areas with an ODFW-recommended wildlife forage mix that includes both native and non-native species, but much of this ground

continues to be plagued with weeds. The Merediths cut and sell hay from some of the bottomland arable land.

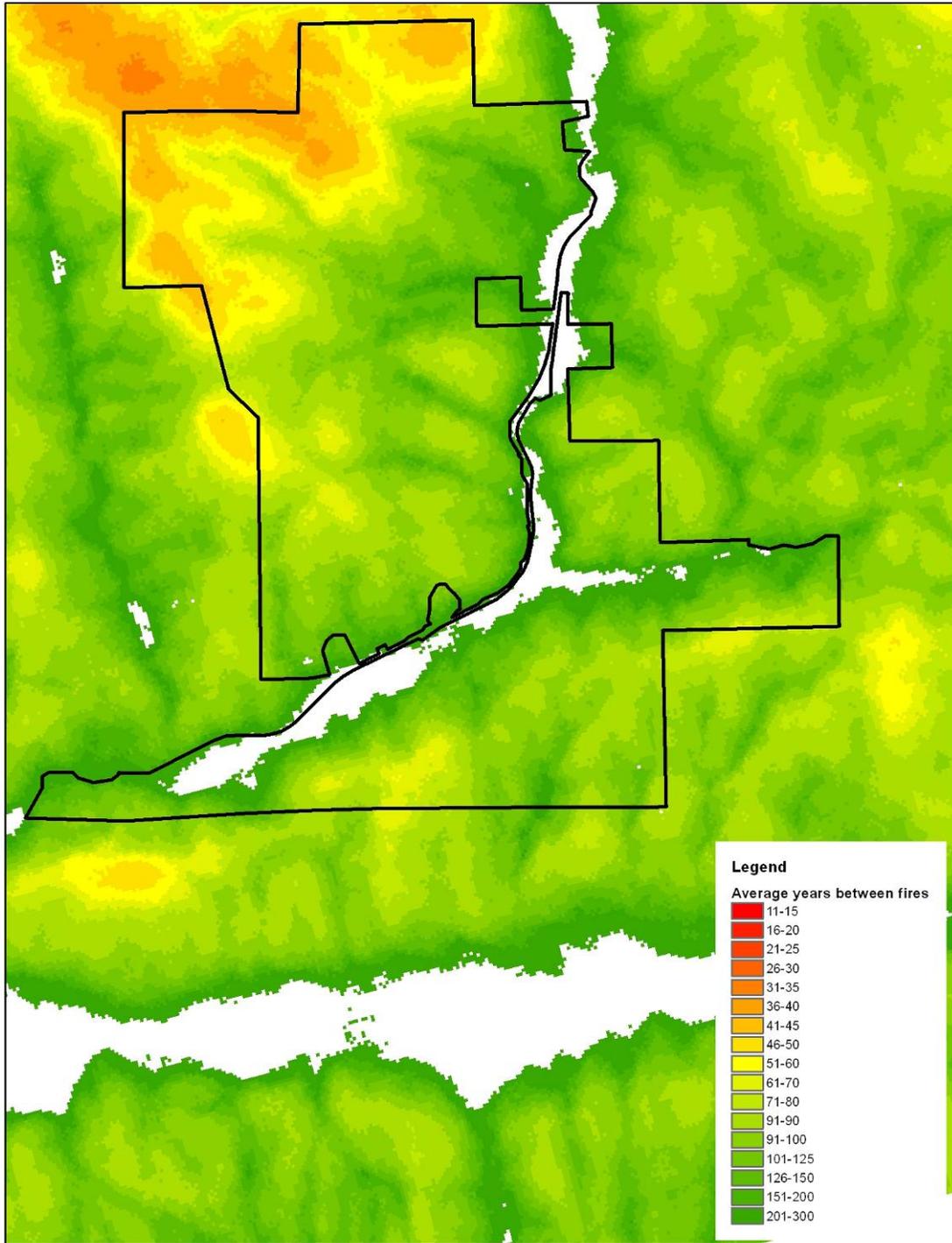
Fuels Management

The Merediths have treated 60%+ of the forested areas of the property for previously overstocked forest conditions and excessive fuel loading relative to pre-European-American settlement conditions. Fuels treatment is still needed on a maximum of 400 acres of forest.

The work done thus far has been a monumental effort that has been quite expensive. Revenues from wood products harvested have only offset costs by about 50%.

This landscape was previously subject to fairly frequent ground fires. Modeled fire return intervals are depicted in Figure 6. This fire return frequency suggests that forest thinning will need to be periodic to clear undergrowth and maintain open forest and woodland conditions. This frequency will be highest in younger stands, and should decrease as larger fire-resistant trees develop. Even in late seral woodland and forest, though, shade tolerant tree and shrub ingrowth is to be expected in the absence of ground fire and this ingrowth will need to be periodically cleared to maintain both habitat and acceptable fuel loadings.

Figure 6. Mean Fire Return interval from LANDFIRE Model



Significant Natural Features

The most unusual and significant feature of the property is arguably the serpentine/ultramafic slopes and outcrops of greenish rock. Serpentine soils contain high levels of certain minerals (such as the heavy metals nickel and chromium) and low levels of certain nutrients – which can make them toxic or infertile to many plants. The soils occurring in these outcrops favor plant species with special adaptations that allow them to tolerate the toxicity and/or infertility of the soil, and this fact accounts for their distinctive flora. These sites are generally fairly sparsely vegetated and visually striking. It is likely that some of the red colored soils on the Grouse Mountain property are also non-metamorphosed ultramafic rock – such as olivinite, periodotite, and dunite.

From a wildlife perspective, Beech Creek and Little Beech Creek are highly significant for their fish habitat. Both streams support strong runs of listed and other fish species. Mature cottonwood riparian forest and relatively dense shrub associates provide nearly ideal shading conditions and wood recruitment.

Strongly red soils also appear to support stronger native bunchgrass communities and may be chemically exclusive to some extent of dense colonization by weeds.

Similarly, the Grouse Mountain mesa is rocky and shallowly soiled, and supports a relatively healthy example of a rigid sagebrush low shrub-steppe community on top. This mesa feature has distinctive flora, and the soils are somewhat mounded in places – suggesting biscuit and swale topography (biscuit scablands).

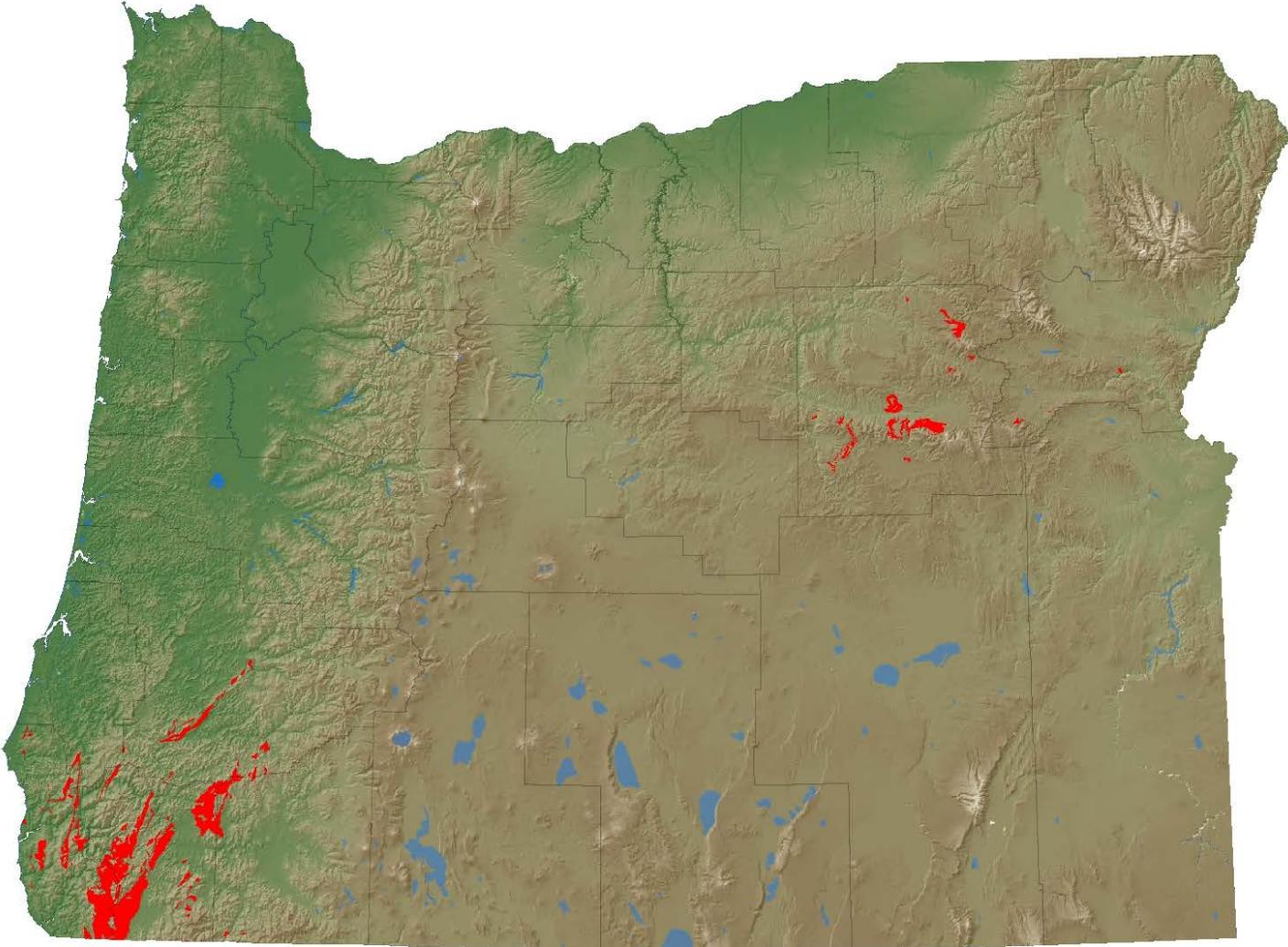
The property has abundant springs on the open slopes as well as in the forests that are valuable plant and animal habitat.

The State Natural Areas Plan indicates habitats that are present and significant in each ecoregion of Oregon. Table 1 presents habitats listed in the Blue Mountains ecoregion that may have significant representation on the Grouse Mountain property. Whether any or all of these potentially significant ecosystem types are present and/or significant enough for registration in the State Natural Areas Plan will require more in-depth assessment of presence, extent, and condition of these communities on the property.

Table 1. Habitats in the State Natural Areas Plan's Blue Mountains Ecoregion Section that May Have Significant Representation on the Grouse Mountain property

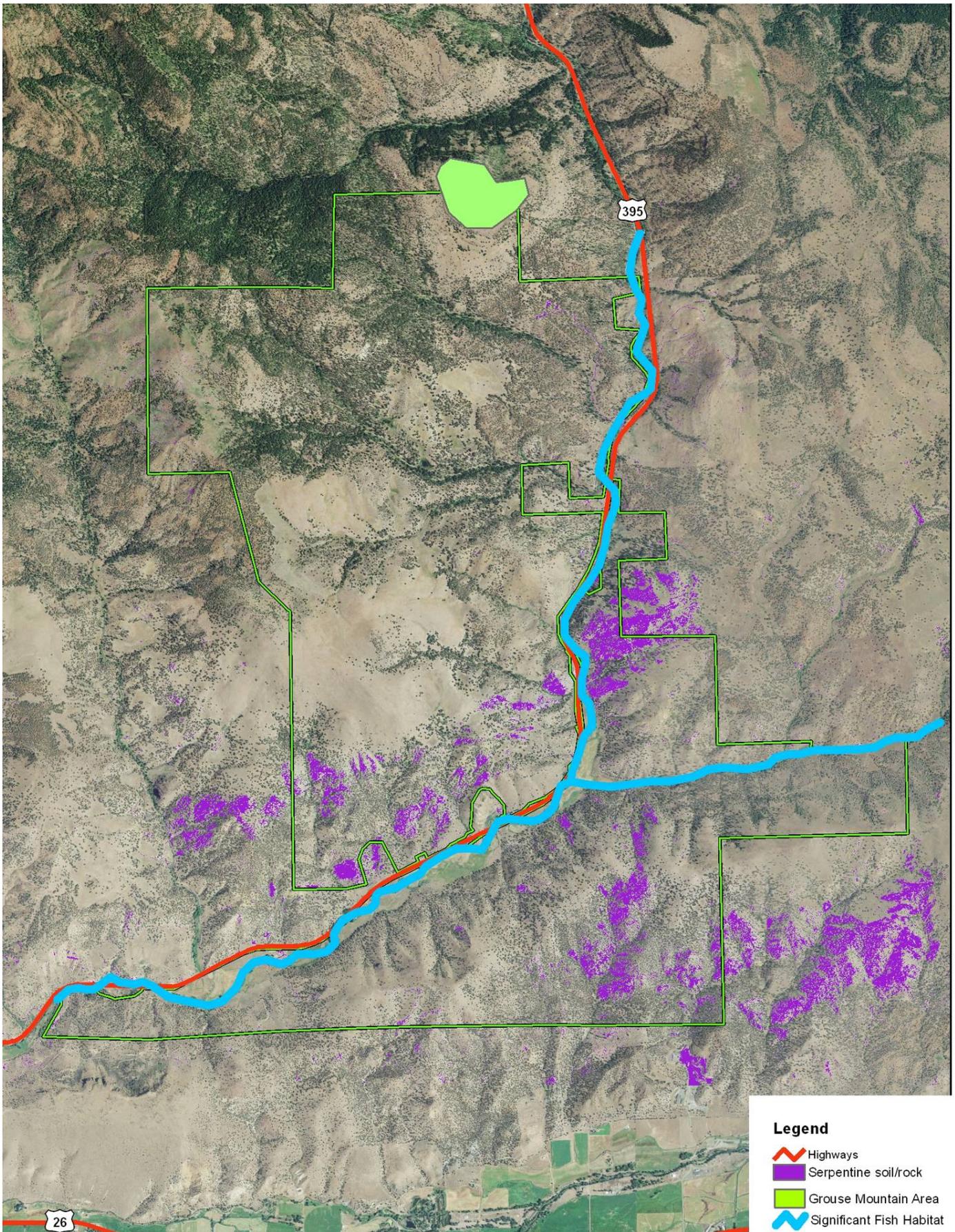
<u>System</u>	<u>Community</u>	<u>Priority</u>
Western Juniper	Western juniper/stiff sagebrush.	Low (already represented elsewhere)
	Western juniper/mountain mahogany.	(already represented elsewhere)
	Western juniper/big sagebrush/bluebunch wheatgrass.	(already represented elsewhere)
	Western juniper/big sagebrush/Idaho fescue.	(already represented elsewhere)
	Western juniper/big sagebrush-bitterbrush/bluebunch wheatgrass & Idaho fescue vegetation.	(already represented elsewhere)
	Western juniper/bluebunch wheatgrass. Western juniper/Idaho fescue.	High
Ponderosa Pine	Ponderosa pine-western juniper/big sagebrush-bitterbrush vegetation mosaic.	Moderate (already represented elsewhere)
	Ponderosa pine/pinegrass with elk sedge if possible.	Moderate
	Ponderosa pine/mountain snowberry.	High
	Ponderosa pine/common snowberry floodplain.	(already represented elsewhere)
Grassland Communities	Biscuit scabland grasslands.	(already represented elsewhere)
	Rigid sagebrush/Sandberg bluegrass scabland.	(already represented elsewhere) (already represented elsewhere)
Shrubland Communities	Mountain mahogany/bunchgrass.	(already represented elsewhere)
	Freshwater lake with aquatic beds and marshy shore.	Unknown
Lacustrine	Bulrush-cattail marsh with aquatic beds.	Low
Palustrine	Low elevation riparian dominated by coyote willow, Pacific willow, or arroyo willow.	High
Riparian	Black cottonwood/common snowberry.	Moderate
	Black cottonwood/snowberry.	Moderate

Figure 7. The Distribution of Ultramafic/Serpentine Rock Outcroppings in Oregon



 Ultramafic Rock of Oregon

Figure 8. Highly Significant Habitats and Natural Features



Restoration Progress and Potential

As has been described briefly in several preceding sections of this report, the Merediths have implemented several management actions that have aimed for ecological restoration of the property. Principal among these are the discontinuation of grazing, the exclusion of livestock from the creeks, conversion of some of the bottomlands to wildlife forage, fuels reduction thinning, and reclaiming Beech Creek floodplain. Each of these is described in more detail below.

Discontinuation of grazing and exclusion of livestock from the creeks

Discontinuation of grazing has had very obvious positive impacts to the riparian areas in particular. Stream banks and floodplains are generally very densely vegetated with wood and herbaceous plants that are essential to stream health in that they provide shade and woody debris recruitment. In upland areas where native bunchgrasses are still significantly present, summer grazing exclusion is presumably resulting in increased abundance of native bunchgrasses over weedy annual grasses in at least some areas. George Meredith has noticed this progression. In areas with no remaining native bunchgrasses the trajectory is less certain.

Conversion of some of the bottomlands to wildlife forage

Although not yet entirely successful, the Merediths – in cooperation with ODFW - have converted some agricultural fields to a wildlife forage “crop” that includes palatable native and non-native grasses and forbs. Weeds continue to be an issue in these fields that have forced restarting the process.

Fuels reduction thinning

60% or more of the forest on the property has been thinned for forest health and fuels reduction. Some of the wood products removed have created revenue to offset the cost of the work. There are still large debris piles that are being worked by a commercial firewood cutter. The amount of wood removed thus far has been enormous, and the associated costs correspondingly large.

Reclaiming Beech Creek floodplain

The Merediths, ODFW, and the Bureau of Reclamation are currently restoring the banks and bed of the reach of Beech Creek within the property. Work has entailed recontouring (decreasing the slope of) much of the bank and placement of woody debris structures. The goal of the work is to encourage the creek to top its banks during high water events, re-establish meanders, capture debris, restore pool/riffle structure, and reclaim flood plain dynamics. During the OPRD August 2012 visit the grading and dam construction were in progress.

Other potential restoration actions to investigate

1. Control of weedy annual grasses in the uplands
 - a. Spring grazing to decrease annual grass abundances while they are actively growing and palatable (and dormant bunchgrasses are not).
 - b. Herbicide applications?

- i. Possible imazapic application, which selectively kills many annual grasses (along with some forbs).
 - ii. Canter R&P application?
 - iii. Low-rate pre-emergent herbicide?
 - iv. All potential herbicide treatments would need to be tested on the native grasses and forbs present to find a balance between target weed treatment and non-target damage to native species.
2. Restoration of fire to the landscape
3. Systematic survey and control of knapweeds, scotch thistle, and other high priority weeds.
4. Completion of fuels reduction in remaining un-treated areas.
5. Use of native bottomland seed mix in agriculturally arable land composed of basin wildrye, thickspike wheatgrass, creeping wildrye, pine bluegrass, indian ricegrass, and needle and thread grass. This grass-only mix would allow for overspraying with broadleaf specific herbicides to kill the problematic scotch thistle, knapweed, etc. that have not been controlled by pure competition from the forage seed mix used thus far. Since the forage seed mix has included broadleaf species, overspraying has not been possible. In a grass-only phased restoration, forbs can be seeded or planted when weeds are substantially controlled and the rhizomatous native grasses have occupied bare ground. It might be necessary to open patches for forb seeding with treatments such as patchy fire, tillage, or spraying to make space for incoming broadleaf species.

Potential Ecological Liabilities Associated with Acquisition

In the interest in identifying natural resource aspects of the property that could/would result in additional cost commitments and management obligations, the following items are offered as inexhaustive examples:

1. Additional fuels treatment needed. This could cost up to \$125,000 (\$250,000 without wood products revenue offset).
2. Weed treatment. This property, while in better condition than most similar land in the area, could require significant weed control costs, *depending on goals*. If non-native annual grasses are tolerated for the most part, the cost would be considerably lower than if the goal were to restore the property to near-pristine conditions.
3. Agricultural/fallow field management. Long-term restoration cost estimates for grass-only native prairie would be in the vicinity of approximately \$1000/ac total over the initial multi-year establishment period. Bottomland native prairie establishment areas would cover no more than 100 acres. Annual maintenance costs after the initial establishment period (which would include periodic mowing or prescribed burning, broadcast spraying, and spot spraying) would be approximately \$200/ac.
4. Woody debris structures. Restoration of the floodplain of Beech Creek has included construction of woody debris structures. These may need either upkeep or removal in the future.
5. Hunting pressure. Management will need to consider potential hunting issues, including pressure to allow hunting, and potentially the need for special hunts as elk and deer populations rise. Other parks near agricultural lands are sometimes pressured to allow hunting because of herds' damage to neighboring farms and retreat to "refuge conditions" on the park.

The Significance of Grouse Mountain Natural Resource and Habitat Values Relative to Those of Other OPRD Properties

Aspects of the Grouse Mountain property described in the preceding sections of this report detail features present on the property without special analysis of how these features fit into the OPRD portfolio of properties as a whole. The discussion below is meant to put the Grouse Mountain property into that context, with special attention to Grouse Mountain characteristics that either add to the offerings of the OPRD portfolio or that are redundant. The following discussion does not analyze the property in relationship to Oregon ecological diversity as a whole, public landholdings as a whole, or other private property that has or could be considered for acquisition. This section is meant only to address Grouse Mountain values relative to current OPRD properties.

Diversity of environment and experience

While many of the habitats and features of the Grouse Mountain property are represented on other park properties, no other park in the system provides as complete of a package of diverse habitats within an accessible context that is well suited to back-country recreational enjoyment. Habitats such as juniper woodland, riparian shrubland, bunchgrass prairie, rock outcroppings, and streams are common in OPRD Blue Mountains landholdings – however, most properties that contain these habitats do not contain them all, and many of them only contain the habitat in a setting less conducive to trail-based and cross-country recreation. All of OPRD’s Blue Mountains properties that contain a range of these habitats are relatively narrow in terms of explorable land and are centered on a feature such as a highway or reservoir. Narrow strip properties do not provide the same quality of experience as properties in which it is possible to get away from roads and experience the landscape without a man-made feature so prominently obvious in the foreground. Other parks that contain a similar range of habitat types, often have accessibility issues such as cliffs, water bodies, or extremely steep slopes.

Other properties on the east side of the state that contain similar diversity and room to roam are Cottonwood Canyon State Park, Smith Rock State Park, Prineville Reservoir State Park, The Cove Palisades State Park, Bates State Park, LaPine State Park, Collier Memorial State Park, Booth State Scenic Corridor, Lake Owyhee State Park, and Succor Creek State Natural Area. Although these properties provide an expanse of diverse habitat, they do not contain the same types of habitat, views, and experience. Some of these properties have very little in common with the landscape of the Grouse Mountain property.

In order to produce an objective basis for comparing the scenic quality, topographic interest, back-country experience, and habitat diversity, a GIS analysis was performed to

assess the character of all OPRD properties east of the Cascade crest. Table 2, below, ranks current OPRD eastside properties along with Grouse Mountain according to their topographic diversity, landcover diversity, and room-to-roam (described below). Results were sorted in that table in order of decreasing habitat/landcover diversity. This GIS analysis is basic version of landscape character assessment that is used in high level planning strategies and overviews.

A basic description of landscape character metrics and methodology:

Topographic interest and landcover diversity measures were calculated from focal Digital Elevation Model (DEM)-derived elevation variation, slope variation, and LANDFIRE existing vegetation and landcover mapping. For topographic interest characterization, topographic diversity across all properties was derived from a statewide Digital Elevation Model (DEM). The DEM was used to produce maps of the amount of slope and elevation variation within a focal radius. The elevation and slope variation were averaged across all property boundaries to produce a measure of the property's topographic diversity. These values were scaled to a range of 1 to 10 for ease of interpretation and combination with other landscape characters to be described more fully below. For landcover diversity, the number of different mapped landcover classes (i.e., types of cover such as forest types, shrubland types, grassland types, rock outcroppings, agriculture, etc) occurring within each property boundary was counted and reported in the table. Like topographic diversity, the landcover diversity tally was scaled to a range of 1 to 10 for use in combination with other parameters. A total diversity score was calculated to combine the two characteristics by adding scaled values of topographic and landcover diversity together

In addition to landscape diversity measures described above, it is useful to consider the concept of "room-to-roam". Room-to-roam is meant to capture the landscape characteristic of unconfined space for cross-country, back-country exploration. Room-to-roam is essentially interior space at a distance from edges, or a feel of being in the middle of a wild, undeveloped space. Wide properties with a square or circular outline have more interior space in relation to edge than do narrow or fragmented properties. For example, a square 4 feet x 4 feet has an area of 16 sqft and a perimeter of 12 feet. A rectangle with dimensions of 1 foot by 16 feet has the same area of 16 sqft, but it's perimeter is much higher at 34 feet. A metric for room-to-roam can be derived by calculation of the ratio of property area versus property perimeter for each property. Long and narrow features have a lower area to perimeter ratio than more blocky features that allow for more dispersal from the developed features such as highways. The area to perimeter ratio gives a metric for characterizing shape - but absolute room-to-roam is dependent on shape in combination with overall size. A meaningful

relative figure for room-to-roam can be calculated by multiplying property size by property shape. This metric was scaled to a range of 1 to 10 for purposes of interpretability and combination with other parameters.

When landscape diversity is considered in conjunction with room to roam (a metric labeled as “total diversity experience” in the table and charts below), a single numerical value can be given for the landscape character of each property assessed that allows comparison of properties’ relative scenic and recreational interest. This value was calculated by adding together the component characters:

$$\text{Total diversity experience} = \text{topographic diversity} + \text{landcover diversity} + \text{room-to-roam}$$

The Grouse Mountain property ranks higher in terms of total diversity experience than all other OPRD properties east of the Cascades except Cove Palisades State Park. Although Cove Palisades ranks higher, it must be said that Cove Palisades is a completely different type of experience – being centered on a large lake, where much of the area of coverage is water and much is inaccessible. Of the “terrestrial” parks east of the Cascades and in the Blue Mountains, Grouse Mountain ranks highest in terms of both landcover type diversity and total diversity experience. In terms of total landscape diversity, Grouse Mountain ranked lower than only The Cove Palisades and OC&E Woods Line State Trail. Again, being centered on a reservoir, Cove Palisades is a completely different kind of experience. OC&E Woods Line is diverse because of its length, but because it is an extremely narrow corridor, it offers little room-to-roam away from the old railway alignment.

The charts below illustrate how the Grouse Mountain property compares to the OPRD property portfolio. Figures 9 and 10 show Grouse Mountain in relationship to both terrestrial and reservoir-based parks. Figures 11 and 12 show Grouse Mountain in relationship to terrestrial/non-reservoir-based properties.

Table 2. Tabulated Landscape Diversity Values for all East-side OPRD Properties and Grouse Mountain from GIS Analysis

NAME	ACRES	area:perimeter ratio	room-to-room(raw) (area*(area/perimeter))	room-to-room scaled 1:10	Number of Landcover Types	landcover types diversity scaled 1:10	MEAN topographic diversity	mean topo diversity normalized scaled 1:10	total diversity (scaled landforms+scaled topo)	total diversity experience (total diversity+scaled roomtoroom)
OC&E Woods Line	1188	46	2405261424	1	46	10	-1.92	2.1	12	13
The Cove Palisades	7440	2018	653900927823	10	37	8	-1.70	5.7	14	23
Grouse Mountain	6524	1855	527287886232	8	36	8	-1.66	6.4	14	22
Blue Mountain Forest	2504	441	42643628165	2	35	8	-1.81	3.9	12	13
Cottonwood Canyon	7732	753	253483267070	4	34	8	-1.56	7.9	15	20
Ukiah-Dale Forest	3114	753	102129528127	2	33	7	-1.44	10.0	17	20
Prineville Reservoir	8800	1800	689927465873	10	32	7	-1.76	4.8	12	22
LaPine	2368	1021	105300895080	2	29	7	-1.95	1.6	8	11
Hilgard Junction	1084	631	29774307351	1	28	6	-1.53	8.6	15	16
Deschutes River	808	944	33235505951	1	27	6	-1.62	7.0	13	15
Smith Rock	651	858	24346452668	1	27	6	-1.45	9.7	16	17
White River Falls	304	562	7442474920	1	27	6	-1.67	6.2	12	13
Succor Creek	2244	1015	99165202007	2	26	6	-1.55	8.2	14	16
Collier	579	918	23177214937	1	26	6	-1.95	1.6	8	9
Minam	610	638	16955126405	1	25	6	-1.48	9.4	15	16
Lake Owyhee	863	785	29526867893	1	24	6	-1.47	9.5	15	16
Sumpter Valley Dredge	97	393	1666487972	1	24	6	-1.92	2.2	8	9
Battle Mountain Forest	443	446	8609338449	1	22	5	-1.73	5.2	10	11
Wallowa Lake Highway Forest	315	292	4009969027	1	22	5	-1.46	9.7	15	16
Iwetemlaykin	59	345	887644435	1	22	5	-1.86	3.1	8	9
Booth	325	528	7474248159	1	20	5	-1.74	5.1	10	11
Wallowa Lake	208	372	3369318738	1	20	5	-1.67	6.2	11	12
Bates	138	458	2744173244	1	20	5	-1.77	4.6	9	10
Farewell Bend	83	150	544463316	1	20	5	-1.85	3.3	8	9
Hat Rock	662	700	20177002583	1	19	4	-1.87	2.9	7	9
Redmond-Bend Juniper	565	383	9412341486	1	19	4	-1.96	1.4	6	7
Unity Forest	86	112	418142483	1	19	4	-1.52	8.7	13	14
Unity Lake	43	206	384224918	1	19	4	-1.88	2.8	7	8

Tumalo	339	402	5933727474	1	18	4	-1.72	5.4	10	11
John Day, Chaparral Recreation Association	136	479	2840459123	1	18	4	-1.72	5.4	10	11
Pilot Butte	121	521	2751348263	1	18	4	-1.61	7.3	12	13
Ontario	94	191	777678673	1	17	4	-1.99	1.0	5	6
Peter Skene Ogden	84	304	1115634182	1	17	4	-1.67	6.3	10	11
Clyde Holliday	43	163	304559908	1	17	4	-1.97	1.3	5	6
Crooked Creek	564	1031	25349162628	1	16	4	-1.82	3.7	8	9
Chandler	95	249	1027883586	1	16	4	-1.67	6.2	10	11
Catherine Creek	158	654	4486152758	1	14	3	-1.54	8.4	12	13
Red Bridge	42	339	622516402	1	14	3	-1.66	6.4	10	11
Frenchglen Corral	28	244	299584081	1	14	3	-1.73	5.2	9	10
Fort Rock	349	674	10251952757	1	13	3	-1.80	4.2	7	9
Jackson F. Kimball	19	189	159008310	1	13	3	-1.80	4.1	7	8
Cline Falls	12	99	52643467	1	13	3	-1.82	3.7	7	8
Deschutes River SSW	226	224	2204938662	1	12	3	-1.58	7.7	11	12
Goose Lake	64	291	812774509	1	12	3	-1.96	1.4	4	5
Emigrant Springs	59	240	629189159	1	12	3	-1.90	2.5	5	7
Sisters	23	92	91343267	1	10	3	-1.98	1.1	4	5
J.S. Burres	14	97	57734902	1	9	2	-1.88	2.8	5	6
Ochoco	250	707	7697183363	1	8	2	-1.72	5.5	8	9
Ochoco Lake	11	138	66375528	1	8	2	-1.88	2.7	5	6
Warm Springs	4	55	10361392	1	8	2	-1.82	3.8	6	7
Arlington	214	371	3451882688	1	7	2	-1.82	3.8	6	7
Clarno	2	56	4846326	1	7	2	-1.86	3.1	5	6
John Day, Chaparral Access	72	342	1069863636	1	6	2	-1.46	9.6	11	12
Fort Rock Cave	20	233	202798118	1	6	2	-1.73	5.2	7	8
Union Shop	13	166	95517206	1	6	2	-1.89	2.6	4	5
Frenchglen Hotel	2	65	4989116	1	5	2	-1.77	4.6	6	7
Dyer	1	36	2160503	1	4	1	-1.49	9.1	11	12
John Day, Hilderbrand	17	189	136074521	1	3	1	-1.73	5.2	6	7
Kam Wah Chung	1	34	1844739	1	3	1	-1.95	1.7	3	4
Pete French Round Barn	2	70	6060015	1	2	1	-1.99	1.0	2	3
Robert Sawyer Shop	1	52	2344106	1	2	1	-1.95	1.6	3	4

Figure 9. Comparative Landscape Diversity and Room to Roam for Properties East of the Cascades and >400acres in size

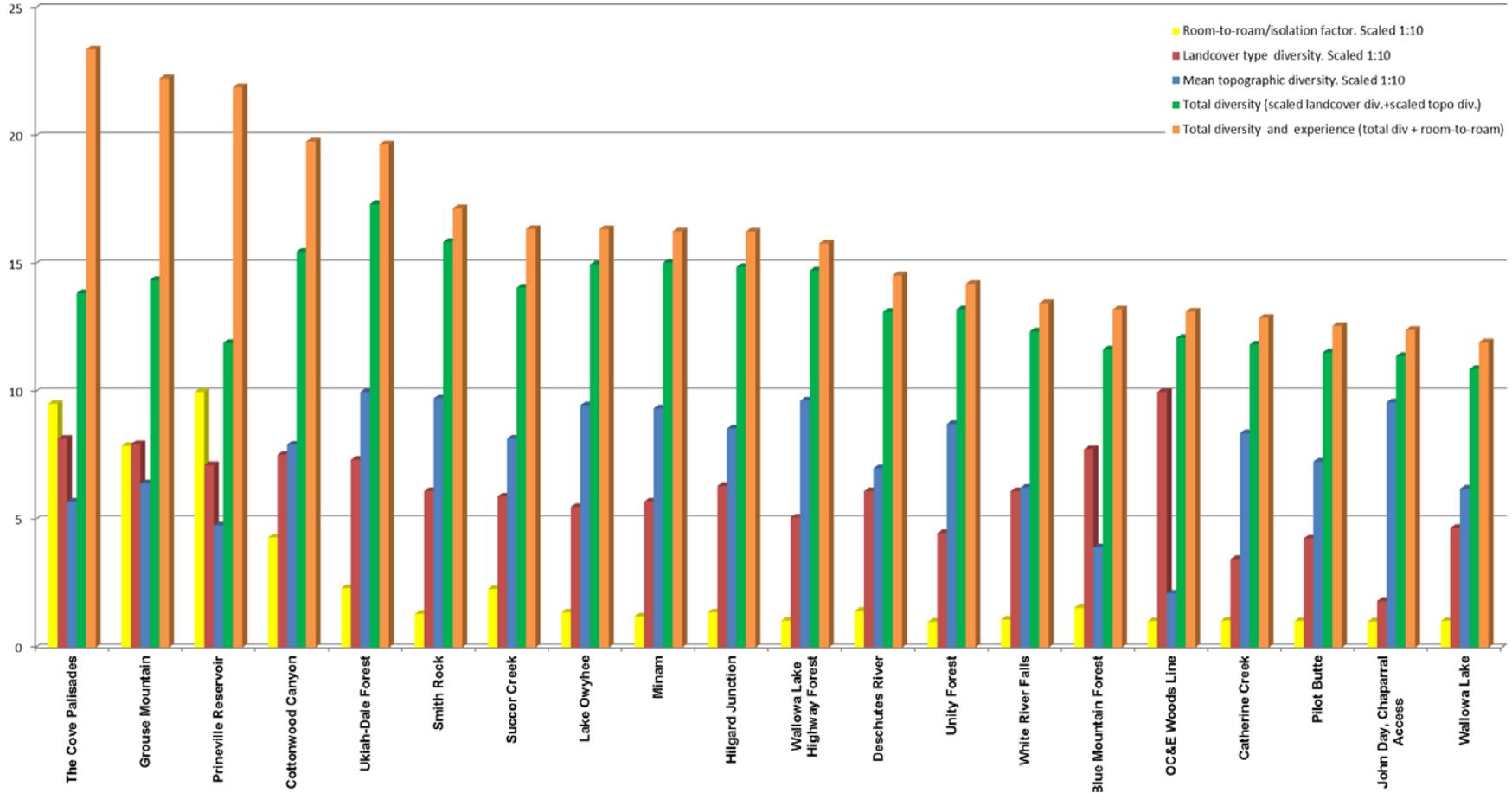


Figure 10. Comparative Landscape Diversity and Room to Roam– Blue Mountains Ecoregion Only, Properties >400 acres in size

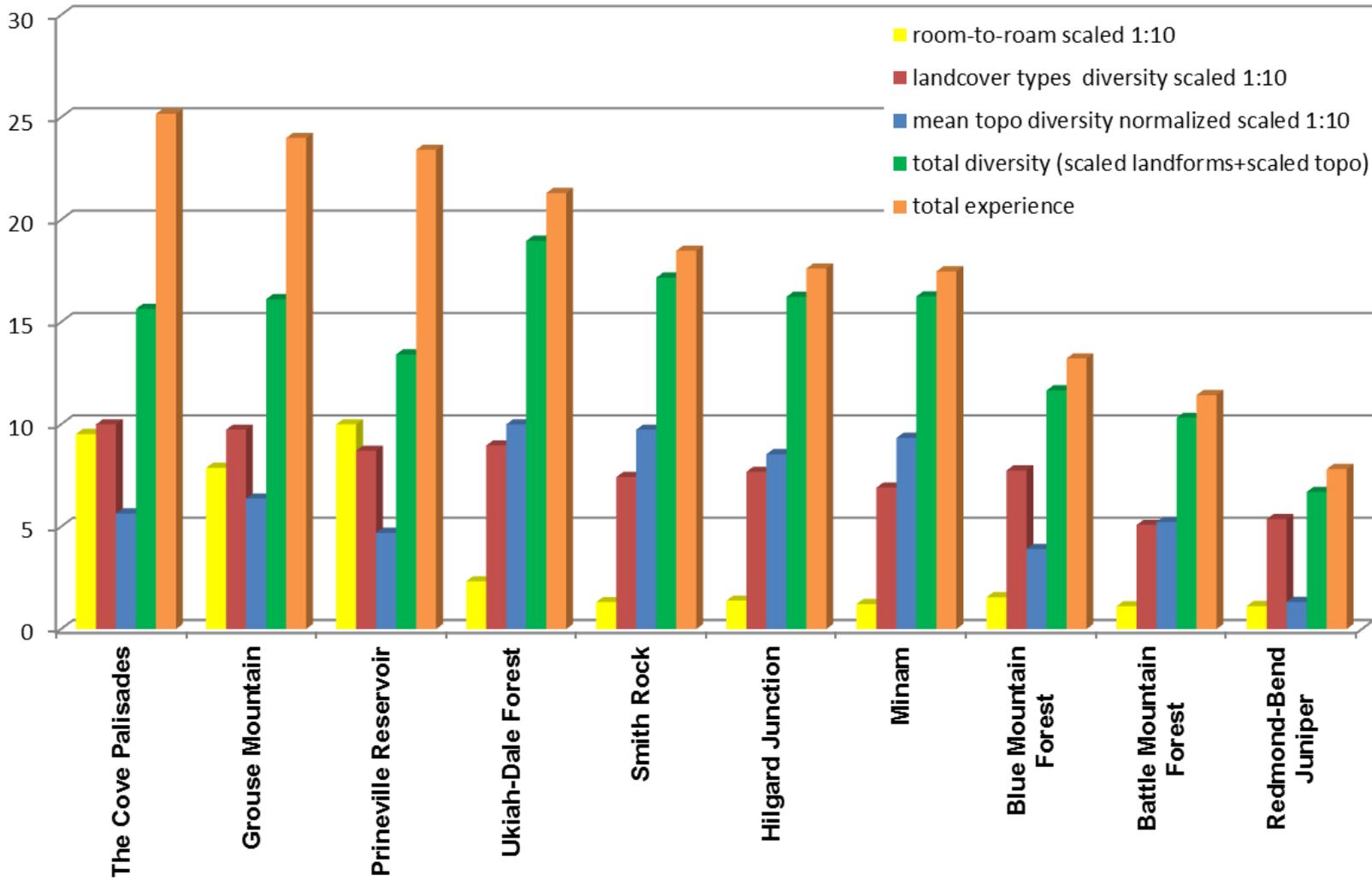


Figure 11. Comparative Landscape Diversity and Room to Roam for Properties Offering Purely Terrestrial Recreation. All properties east of the Cascades crest >400acres in size. except those centering on reservoirs

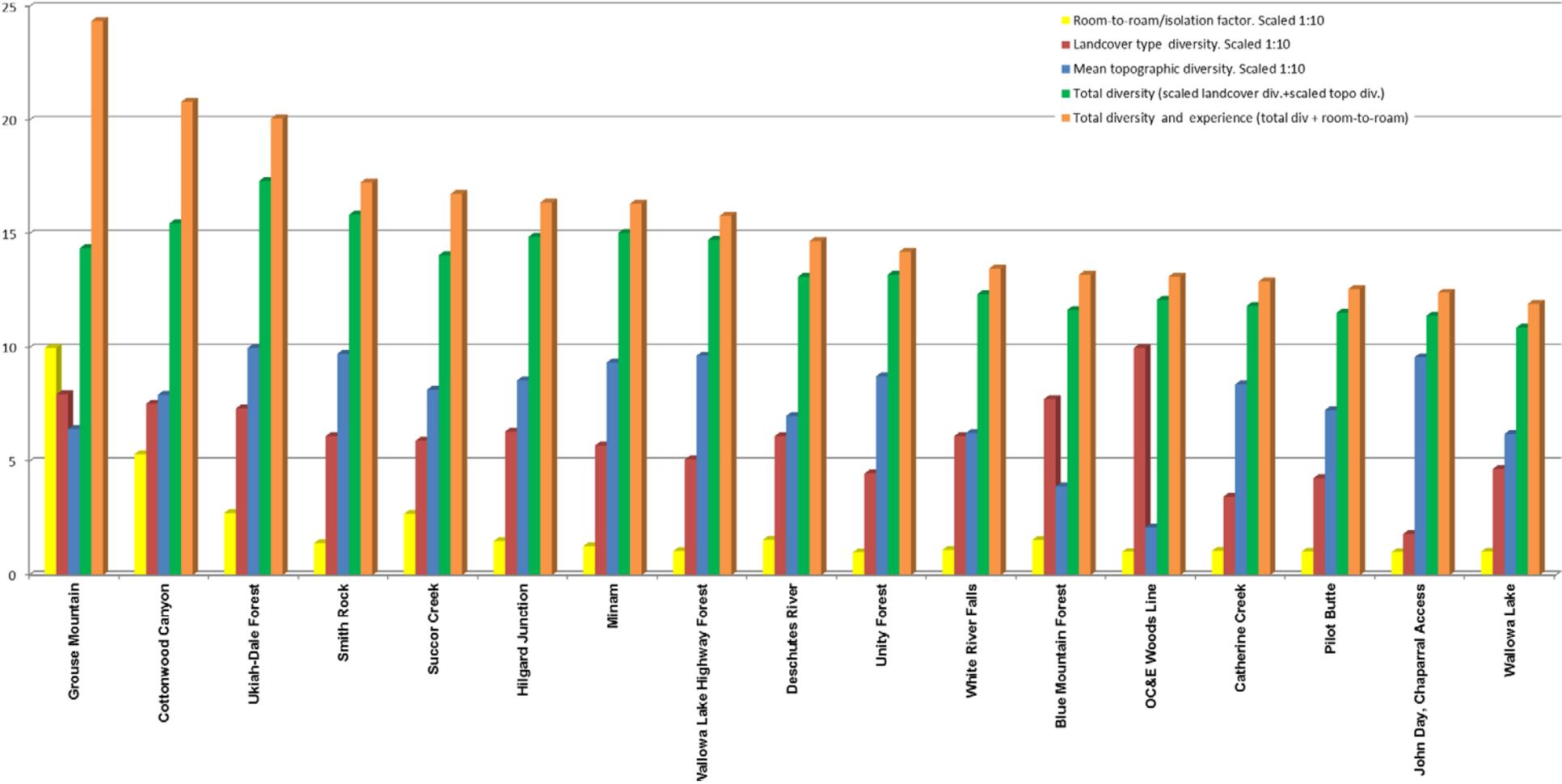
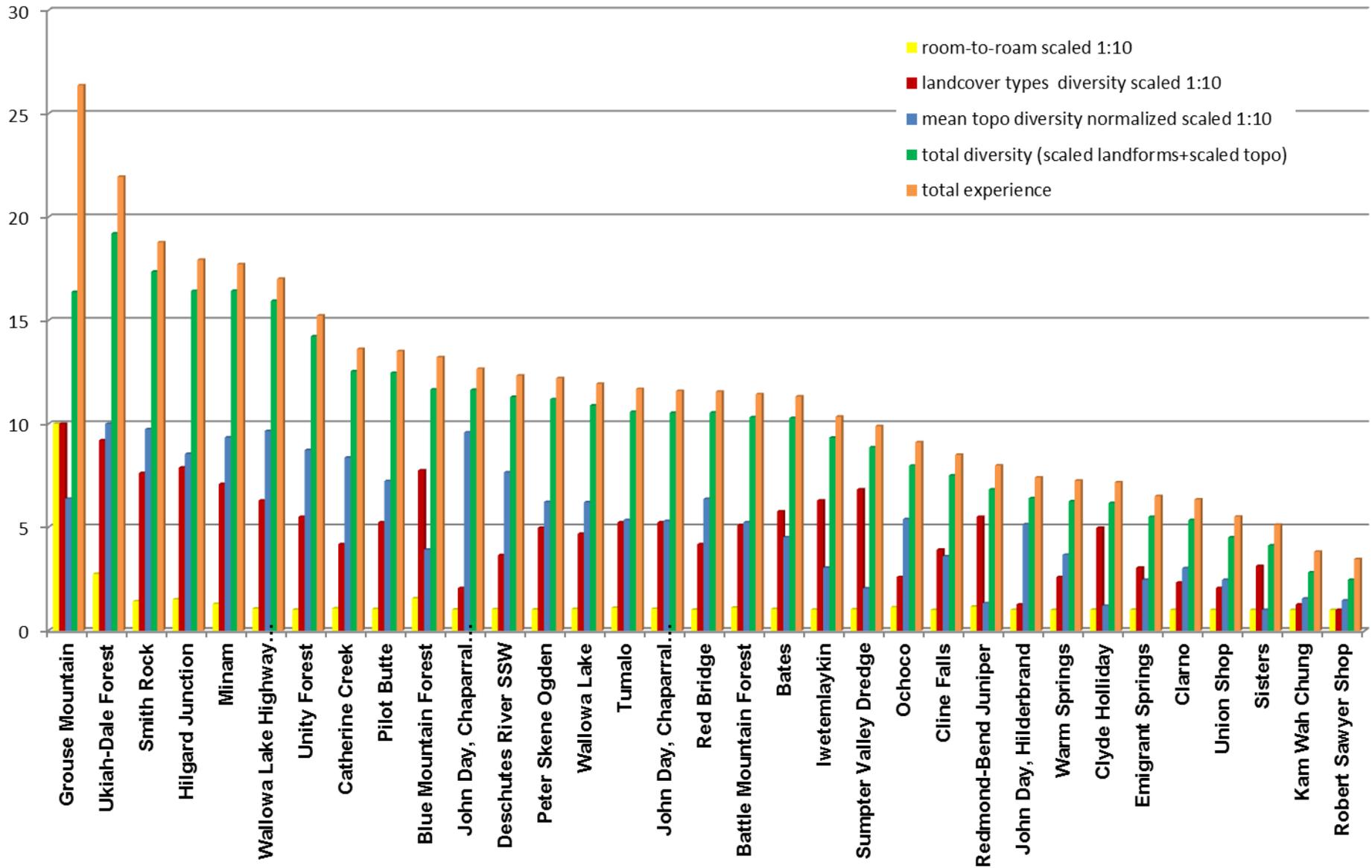


Figure 12. Comparative Landscape Diversity and Room to Roam for Properties Offering Purely Terrestrial Recreation. All properties in the Blue Mountains Ecoregion regardless of size, except those centering on reservoirs.



East-side serpentine/ultramafic soils and rock

No other State Parks in eastern or central Oregon contain outcroppings of serpentine or ultramafic rock, or soils derived from ultramafic sources. OPRD does have several properties with serpentine habitats on the west side of the Cascades in Josephine and Curry counties, however these sites are completely dissimilar in appearance and in associated vegetation. Serpentine and ultramafic soils harbor unique species and plant communities that are specially adapted to their semi-toxic soils.

Mountain mahogany shrubland and steppe

Mountain mahogany habitat has limited distribution in Oregon. It occurs sporadically and in relatively small stands, and is considered an important habitat type. According to the Rex Crawford and Jimmy Kagan in *Wildlife-Habitat Relationships in Oregon and Washington* (Johnson, D. H. and T. A. O'Neil, Oregon State University Press, 2001) , “one third of Pacific Northwest juniper and mountain mahogany community types listed in the National Vegetation Classification are considered imperiled or critically imperiled”. A table of mountain mahogany plant associations and their rarity rankings are reproduced in Table 3, below. There is probably some mountain mahogany present within Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor or Battle Mountain Forest State Scenic Corridor, but presence and distribution are unknown. The only currently known mountain mahogany habitat on OPRD property is in mixed conifer woodland of Booth State Scenic Corridor west of Lakeview near the southern border of the state. The mountain mahogany stands present at Grouse Mountain are high quality and dispersed. Due to the scale of the property and distance from the highway, these sites are unparalleled in other OPRD landholdings.

Mountain Mahogany Community	RANK*
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Artemisia arbuscula / Poa secunda - Pseudoroegneria spicata	G4S4
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Artemisia tridentata ssp. vaseyana	G3S2
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Calamagrostis rubescens	G1S1
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Festuca idahoensis	G5S3
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Festuca idahoensis - Pseudoroegneria spicata	G2S2
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Prunus virginiana	G3S3
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Pseudoroegneria spicata	G5S3
Cercocarpus ledifolius / Symphoricarpos oreophilus	G2S2
Juniperus occidentalis / Cercocarpus ledifolius - Symphoricarpos oreophilus	G2S2
Juniperus occidentalis / Cercocarpus ledifolius / Carex geyeri	G2S2
Juniperus occidentalis / Cercocarpus ledifolius / Pseudoroegneria spicata	G4S4
Pinus ponderosa / Cercocarpus ledifolius	G3S2

Mountain Mahogany Community	RANK*
Pseudotsuga menziesii / Cercocarpus ledifolius	G2S2

*** Rank Definitions**

The ranking is a 1-5 scale, based primarily on the number of known occurrences, but also including threats, sensitivity, area occupied, and other biological factors. In this booklet, the ranks occupy two lines. The top line is the Global Rank and begins with a "G". If the taxon has a trinomial (a subspecies, variety or recognized race), this is followed by a "T" rank indicator. The second line is the State Rank and begins with the letter "S". The ranks are summarized below (see page 6 for migratory bird ranks):

- 1 = Critically imperiled because of extreme rarity or because it is somehow especially vulnerable to extinction or extirpation, typically with 5 or fewer occurrences.
- 2 = Imperiled because of rarity or because other factors demonstrably make it very vulnerable to extinction (extirpation), typically with 6-20 occurrences.
- 3 = Rare, uncommon or threatened, but not immediately imperiled, typically with 21-100 occurrences.
- 4 = Not rare and apparently secure, but with cause for long-term concern, usually with more than 100 occurrences.
- 5 = Demonstrably widespread, abundant, and secure.
- H = Historical Occurrence, formerly part of the native biota with the implied expectation that it may be rediscovered.
- X = Presumed extirpated or extinct.
- U = Unknown rank.
- NR = Not yet ranked.

Low elevation ponderosa pine woodland in Blue Mountains ecoregion

All other representatives of the type in OPRD ownership occur along narrow highway buffers or stream terraces that do not give the wild feel of the habitat in the same way that the stands on the Grouse Mountain property do. Bates State Park contains similar, but higher elevation and much smaller, versions of this habitat type. Due to property scale and disturbance history, the ponderosa pine wood land present at Bates State Park does not have the same natural and isolated feel of the stands at Grouse Mountain.

Wildflower meadows in a context of expansive views

Smaller, but similar wildflower views in a large landscape context (rather than a highway buffer as in the cases of Ukiah-Dale, Blue Mountain, and Battle Mountain) are present at Iwetemlaykin State Heritage Site, Prineville Reservoir State Park, Cove Palisades State Park, Hat Rock State Park, and Smith Rock State Park. The wildflower assemblage at each of these these sites is different. The scale and diversity of the Grouse Mountain

property provide much higher quality wildflower meadow scenic qualities, and the abundance of springs and different moisture regimes provide greater diversity.

Low elevation restorable bottomland

The bottomland fields present at Grouse Mountain have already had restoration begun. Accessibility, distance from development and disturbed sites, water availability, and growing environment make them more suitable than other sites for native bottomland grassland steppe and big sagebrush shrub steppe than all other sites in OPRD ownership. Iwetemlaykin State Heritage Site and Hat Rock State Park may offer secondary opportunities. Cottonwood Canyon State Park and Succor Creek State Natural Area have similar bottomland potential in a different and more arid ecoregions.

High quality riparian cottonwood gallery forest and shrubland

Since cattle exclusion, riparian conditions have significantly improved at Grouse Mountain. There are some areas of relic mature black cottonwood riparian gallery forest as well. At a smaller scale, similar riparian habitat is emerging at Bates and some is present at Clyde Holiday State Recreation Site. The riparian habitat at Grouse Mountain is more natural in that grade has not been as manipulated and filled as it has at the other sites. Cottonwood Canyon State Park has some of this habitat in emergent stages of establishment, but the environment of Cottonwood Canyon is much more arid and characteristic of canyonland than the more rolling Blue Mountains topography of the Grouse Mountain site.

Moisture diversity of springs in context of otherwise semi-arid bunchgrass and juniper woodland habitat

The grouse mountain property has an abundance of small springs that add diversity to the landscape and provide higher wildlife habitat value. No other OPRD properties in the Blue Mountains have as many remote springs.

The Grouse Mountain mesa with expansive views over wildflowers and biscuit/swale topography

No other examples of this feature and habitat type are present on OPRD properties in the Blue Mountains Ecoregion. Similar topography is found in more arid environments of the Columbia Plateau ecoregion as well as in the eastern Columbia River gorge, but no other representatives of the type occur on parks property in the Blue Mountains ecoregion.

Rigid sagebrush in Blue Mountains ecoregion

There are no other known examples of rigid sagebrush habitat on OPRD ownership in the Blue Mountains ecoregion. In the Columbia Plateau ecoregion, rigid sagebrush shrub-steppe is present at cottonwood canyon, in a much more arid environment. Rigid sagebrush is not rare statewide, but rigid sagebrush communities range in conservation rank from uncommon (“S3” rank, see above rank descriptions under Mountain Mahogany) to stable (“S4” rank), but with cause for long term concern according to the Classification of Native Vegetation of Oregon.

Forest and woodland fuels treatment already done

A major advantage of the Grouse Mountain property in terms of acquisition priority in the context of similar properties in the Blue Mountains ecoregion is that it has had the vast majority of forest fuel conditions treated for forest health and fire resiliency already. Restoration of forest and woodland habitat overstory structure is mostly complete.

Property contains a wide expanse of land spanning a natural watershed from ridge to ridge.

Other OPRD properties in the Blue Mountains tend to offer only a portion of the aspects within a watershed, or are very narrow. The scale of the Watershed expanse at Grouse Mountain is visually impressive. Cottonwood Canyon State Park, Smith Rock State Park, Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor, and Battle Mountain Forest State Scenic Corridor also contain cross sections of natural (non-reservoir) watersheds; however all of these properties have a subjective isolated canyon feel, rather than a larger rolling watershed feeling.

Property abuts other public lands

Abutting public lands allows for a wider range of recreational experience where trail connections can be made.

Large areas of relatively-intact native bunchgrass steppe and shrub-steppe.

While other State Park properties in the blue mountain ecoregion also offer large areas of relatively intact native bunchgrass steppe and shrub-steppe, all other examples are less easily accessible by foot. Most are present along narrow and very steep highway corridors.

References

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- Johnson, D.H., T.A. O'Neil. 2001. Wildlife-Habitat Relationships in Oregon and Washington. Oregon State University Press. Corvallis, OR. 736 pp.
- Kagan, J. S., J. A. Christy, M. P. Murray, J. A. Titus. 2004. Classification of Native Vegetation of Oregon. Oregon Natural Heritage Information Center, Oregon State University: Corvallis, Oregon.
- LANDFIRE: LANDFIRE 1.1.0 Existing Vegetation Type and Biophysical Settings layers. U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey. [Online]. Available: <http://landfire.cr.usgs.gov/viewer/> [2010, October 28].
- Ludington, Steve, B.C. Moring, R.J. Miller, K.S. Flynn, J.G. Evans, P.A. Stone. 2006. Oregon Geologic Units, Edition: 1.0. Vector digital data: <http://mrddata.usgs.gov/geology/state/state.php?state=OR>. Downloaded September, 2013.

Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission
February 20, 2014

Agenda Item: 3	Action
Subject: Grouse Mountain Ranch Acquisition – Final Order	
Presented by: Jim Morgan	

Exhibit D

Public comment received Feb. 5-14

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department Commissioners:

I have observed the development of the proposed Grouse Mountain State Park concept for some time and have opted to reserve comment. But it seems that as a decision draws near, that I as a citizen of the state have the responsibility to make my feelings known. Please accept my opinions in the manner they are being offered, which is one of respect for the difficult decisions you all make for the long term benefit of Oregonians and visitors to our state..

It seems that some are caught up with the question of *if* this large property could be made into an attractive state park. I think that OPRD has demonstrated that with enough labor and money you *can* make many properties into a state park. Although you have a stable funding source, costs of operations for all government services are growing faster than the revenue. It seems that priorities need to be set on seeking the most mission driven impact for the least cost with any new acquisitions. So, the question isn't *can* Grouse Mountain be a state park, but *should* it be.

OPRD has made a reputation for itself that is among the highest of all state agencies. This has been done through providing consistently high quality customer service; maintaining facilities that are clean and safe; and meeting the needs of Oregonians and their visitors. Does Grouse Mountain provide a net gain or loss to this statewide effort and resulting public support?

Many other states have combined their recreation facilities with large natural resource preservation projects. These states often don't have a large presence of federal natural resource agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service and the Bureau of Reclamation to fill that role. Many of them are also feeling the strain of inadequate financial support, stemming from inadequate public support. Their efforts are diluted away from the core service delivery that OPRD has focused on. OPRD is growing in capacity to manage natural resources, but it is most successfully done as a supporting role to outdoor recreation, and often to fill a niche that is not being otherwise addressed. This work is very demanding of time and money as Silver Falls State Park and Cottonwood Canyon State Park demonstrate. Resources to take on these efforts may be justified, but only if they address OPRD's core function. Silver Falls is a good example of how this can be done; however, it is located near a large population base with a significant and unique scenic, historic and recreational base on which to build. Grouse Mountain does not provide anything significantly scenic or historic that isn't offered on thousands of acres of federal natural resource lands nearby. OPRD could develop quality recreational offerings at Grouse Mountain, but with the lack of a built-in demand by a large population base; difficult access due to winding 2-lane highways and winter driving conditions; and nothing unique to attract visitors, would the investment for development and maintenance be the highest use for those funds?

Since growing the size of government is not popular politically, addition of new properties should be done with a full realization of how it will be funded. Staffing and funds to operate new facilities come from diminishing services in other areas. Does it make sense to reduce the current OPRD mission driven service that has generated strong public support to expand into areas where the service is already provided by others?

In a poll by the local newspaper a little more than 50% of the public responded in favor of Grouse Mountain becoming a state park. But that leaves a significant number of people responding to the poll that are against it. This sentiment is echoed in the results of the local group working to draft a Memorandum of Understanding with OPRD to determine how the property would be managed. Despite OPRD's track record of quality operations, the perspective that the community's voice is not

being heard creates a feeling that they need to micro-manage how OPRD maintains, develops and operates the property through this Memorandum. Depending on the final version of this agreement, there is a very high potential for continued public dissatisfaction due to OPRD's inability to meet the public expectations; additional drain of resources attempting to collaboratively manage the site; and most importantly OPRD becoming distracted away from its mission while trying to meet others'.

Please don't mistake me. This is a beautiful property and Mr. Meredith has done a wonderful job developing it. Unfortunately OPRD does not have a high level of discretionary resources. His home is beautiful, but the long term operational and maintenance costs would certainly not be justified for a seasonal facility at the end of a 1.25 mile steep single lane driveway with no real draw to create a large paying customer base. That same theme applies to the entire property. It is beautiful, but not unique. It would be fun to explore, but no more so than the surrounding public lands. So, why would the public pay to go here when they can go elsewhere for free? And why should OPRD take away from successful operations and public support throughout the state to acquire and operate a property that will likely never break even financially, or in terms of community support, or protect a unique resource?

I understand that there are funds available from the Bandon Exchange if it is approved and that these reduce the upfront costs of the Grouse Mountain acquisition. These funds could be used more effectively in other counties where public land isn't so prevalent; expanded OPRD presence is desired by the community and public officials; and a much better business case can be made for the long term operations.

Thank you for considering my personal opinions.

Sincerely,

Jim Hutton

Eastern Oregon resident, supporter, and recreation professional

HAVEL Chris * OPRD

From: James Vaughan <james.vaughan@centurylink.net>
Sent: Friday, February 14, 2014 2:11 PM
To: oprd.publiccomment@state.or.us
Subject: Grouse Mountain acquisition

To Whom it may Concern:

I am a young veteran who grew up in Grant County and has recently moved back to Grant County. The reason I moved back to Grant County is because I have a dream, the American Dream if you will. I didn't grow up with much, and while I was serving my term in the Air Force I made the decision that I wanted to return home and start my own cow-calf operation. I have been waiting on it for seven years and am just now starting to realize it. However, since I've been home I have found it to be extremely difficult to find land to either lease or that is anywhere near reasonably priced for what it can support in agricultural use.

We already have smaller plots being sold as recreational properties with prices that the vast majority of locals can't afford, and certainly won't be able to make money on should they choose to invest in agriculture. The Federal Government already owns near 70% of all the land and the Forest Service just acquired more land with the Checkerboard properties. It's hard to stay motivated with all the private lands drying up and going up in price when you're trying to run an agricultural business, even harder when you're trying to start. If it's hard for me to start, how is it going to be for my children and grandchildren or perhaps yours if they so choose? It's hard for me to believe I was fighting for the American dream of freedom and opportunity when both keep seeming to diminish every time I read the news.

I ask that you do not go forward with the acquisition of the Grouse Mountain Ranch, if for any reason, for the preservation of the American Dream.

Thank you for your time,

--

James Vaughan
541-421-9807
541-620-4092

HAVEL Chris * OPRD

From: carol dickens <vintageus2003@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, February 14, 2014 1:41 PM
To: oprd.publiccomment@state.or.us
Subject: Comment on Grouse Mt.

I would love to see this happen, I am in favor of the Grouse Mt. State park coming to Grant Co. we need more jobs and we need people to want to come here. I believe it will be a big draw for our community. We need something here, we have a lot to see, and a place to get away from it all. I am in support of the parks. Thank you for giving me a chance to comment on this.

Claurita Roberts
860 E. Main
John Day, Or 97845

HAVEL Chris * OPRD

From: norm fowle <nfowle2002@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, February 14, 2014 12:57 PM
To: PUBLICCOMMENT * OPRD
Subject: Grouse Mt.

Please vote NO on the Grouse Mt. as a new Oregon State Park. This piece of ground is of very poor quality compared to all the rest of our quality State Parks. And, if compared to a 100 Beef Cow ranch would be valued very low, like 3 on a ten point scale.

I have lived here close to Grouse Mt. for 35 years years, Cowboy-ed, Ranched, Taught School, Hunted, Cut Firewood, etc. I have observed many of the previous owners over the years come and go. I also have been on parts of the Grouse Mt. property to personally feel the soil, trees, grass, water, wildlife.

I have a BS. and MA. in Vocational Agriculture from Cal Poly, and majored in Animal Husbandry.

Again, please look at and compare the costs and quality of this as a future state Park. Not good as we look down the road for our State Parks, expenses/maintenance/ labor costs.

The state budgets are already pressured. I do not see this as a high attraction destination park or as a having a chance for self sufficiency.

Thanks,

Norm and Susan Fowle
Mt. Vernon, Or.

Feb. 14, 2014

11 am

HAVEL Chris * OPRD

From: Harriet Crum <hcrum@centurytel.net>
Sent: Friday, February 14, 2014 10:52 AM
To: oprd.publiccomment@state.or.us
Subject: Grouse Mountain

26917 Chimney Gulch Rd.
John Day, OR 97845
hcrum@centurytel.net
Feb. 14, 2014, 11:00am

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Atten: Commissioners,

This is just a reminder to you before you Feb. 20th meeting. Grant County's economy is based on agriculture. Therefore maintaining open space for agriculture is vital to us.
Taking the Grouse Mountain acreage out of agriculture use and putting it into a park is not consistent with the treasured agriculture and open space philosophy of Eastern Oregon and foremost Grant County.
This acreage is better sold to a private property owner who will graze and irrigate it for hay crops.
Please consider this factor in your decision.
Thank you.
Harriet Crum