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March 21, 2026

Kim Prill
State Director
BLM Oregon/Washington
1220 SW 3rd Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Submitted via ePlanning website
Project Number DOI-BLM-ORWA-0000-2026-0001-RMP-EIS

Dear Director Prill:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Bureau of Land Management's revision of the Northwestern and Coastal Oregon and Southwestern Oregon Resource Management Plans. I am writing to submit American Whitewater's materials for consideration in this planning effort.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954 with approximately 50,000 supporters, 7,000 dues-paying members, and 100 locally based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater enthusiasts across the nation. Our mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely.

This submission includes two related but independent components addressing the restored reach of the Upper Klamath River between the former J.C. Boyle Dam site and the designated Wild and Scenic River reach approximately 4.5 miles downstream:

1. Comments on Wild and Scenic River eligibility for the restored reach, and
2. Nomination of the Upper Klamath River Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

The Wild and Scenic River eligibility comment identifies the Bureau's obligation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to evaluate this reach for eligibility based on current conditions following dam removal and restoration of its free-flowing condition.

The ACEC nomination proposes a management framework under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to provide special management attention to the river corridor and canyon lands that support these values.

These components address the same geographic area and resource values but arise under different statutory authorities and serve complementary purposes within the RMP process.

American Whitewater is separately commenting on other aspects of the RMP revisions via comments with Outdoor Alliance and with Earthjustice et al. We incorporate those comments by reference.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Attachments (Uploaded with this cover letter via ePlanning website):

1. American Whitewater Upper Klamath WSR Eligibility Comment.pdf
2. American Whitewater Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC Nomination.pdf

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A Proposal to Designate the Upper Klamath River Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in Klamath Falls Field Office Planning Area of the Lakeview District, Bureau of Land Management

Submitted by American Whitewater
March 21, 2026

In Response to the February 19, 2026 Notice of Intent to Revise
Resource Management Plans for Western Oregon

1. PROPOSED ACEC OVERVIEW

Name of Proposed ACEC: Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC

Primary Values: Important natural systems and processes; fish and wildlife resources; scenic values; cultural and tribal resources; distinctive botanical communities; and ecosystem resilience associated with post-dam removal ecological recovery.

General Location: The Klamath River canyon below the former J.C. Boyle Dam site and the existing Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC in Klamath County, Oregon. See Attachment A for a detailed map and geospatial links.

Legal Description: Portions of Sections 1, 11, 12, and 13, Township 40 South, Range 6 East, Willamette Meridian, Oregon

Acres: 351.9

2. SUMMARY OF RESOURCE VALUES AND SIGNIFICANCE

This proposal nominates Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands along the Upper Klamath River Canyon for designation as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The proposed ACEC includes nearly 352 acres of BLM-administered lands located along approximately two miles of the Upper Klamath River below the former J.C. Boyle Dam site to the upstream boundary of the existing Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC.

Following the removal of the J.C. Boyle Dam and associated hydropower infrastructure in 2024, this reach of the river has been restored to free-flowing conditions after more than six decades of diversion into the hydropower project that left the river without substantial flows. Because this section of the Upper Klamath River was diverted rather than flooded by the hydropower

project, it retains largely intact canyon landscapes, aquatic and riparian habitats, and scenic and recreational values. With the restoration of natural flows, the river corridor has rapidly reestablished ecological function and now represents one of the most visually striking and ecologically intact canyon landscapes along the Upper Klamath River. Anadromous fish returned to this reach in late 2024 and, as of March 2026, are confirmed to have successfully established breeding populations.

The proposed ACEC contains significant ecological, scenic, and recreational values that are closely connected to those recognized in the Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC, the Upper Klamath River ACEC, and the designated Upper Klamath Wild and Scenic River. These areas collectively form a continuous corridor of outstanding riverine landscapes and natural processes along the Upper Klamath River.

The canyon also supports exceptional recreational values. The restored river reach now provides a high-quality whitewater boating experience that is comparable to the well-known Hells Corner Run immediately downstream. The river corridor and canyon also support angling, wildlife viewing, photography, and other nature-based recreation opportunities.

Designation of the Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC would recognize and protect these important natural, ecological, scenic, and cultural resources and values while ensuring that management of these public lands maintains the restored natural processes and landscape character that define this portion of the Upper Klamath River. These values merit careful consideration by the BLM for establishment as an ACEC as part of the Southwest Oregon Resource Management Plan revision process now underway.

The Bureau of Land Management is also required, as part of this Resource Management Plan revision, to evaluate river segments for eligibility under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In its 1990 eligibility study, BLM identified multiple outstandingly remarkable values associated with the Upper Klamath River canyon; however, the reach between J.C. Boyle Dam and the J.C. Boyle powerhouse was found ineligible solely due to the absence of a free-flowing condition under hydropower operations. With the removal of J.C. Boyle Dam in 2024 and restoration of continuous flow, free-flowing condition has been fully restored. This reach now warrants reevaluation for Wild and Scenic River eligibility. ACEC designation would provide complementary management for these values within the broader context of river corridor conservation and planning.

3. ACEC POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Overview of ACEC Designation

An Area of Critical Environmental Concern (hereafter ACEC) is defined as an area within the public lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes. On BLM lands, ACEC designation indicates to the public that BLM recognizes that an area has significant values and has established special management measures to protect those values.

When Congress enacted the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), it declared that "it is the policy of the United States that . . . regulations and plans for the protection of public land areas of critical environmental concern be **promptly** developed." 43 U.S.C. 1701(a)(11). FLPMA defines an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC) as "areas within the public lands where special management attention is required . . . **to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes**, or to protect life and safety from natural hazards." 43 U.S.C. 1702(a); BLM Manual MS-1613, 1.1 (emphasis added). To protect these areas and prevent irreparable damage, the Secretary shall, during the revision of land use plans, "**give priority to the designation and protection of areas of critical environmental concern**." 43 U.S.C. 1712(c)(3) (emphasis added). It is important for BLM to note here that wildlife resource values are included in this statutory list.

State BLM directors are responsible for (1) ensuring compliance with FLPMA and other relevant law and policy for ACECs and (2) identifying, evaluating, and prioritizing areas that have potential for designation and management as ACECs. BLM Manual MS-1613, 1.4(B).

FLPMA does not treat ACECs and their designation as optional. These provisions in FLPMA establish the clear statutory mandate that BLM must identify, designate, and manage ACECs "to protect a diverse array of unique and important areas and features including fish and wildlife habitats, rare plant populations, archaeological and historic sites, areas of significance to Tribes, and visually unique natural landscape features." BLM Manual MS-1613, 1.1; see also 1.6 ("FLPMA requires the Secretary to give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs"). ACECs are the only conservation designation that FLPMA explicitly requires BLM to prioritize in land use planning.

FLPMA requires the BLM to manage public lands for multiple use and sustained yield, which includes maintaining the long-term health and productivity of ecosystems that support recreation, grazing, wildlife habitat, cultural values, water resources, and other public benefits. ACECs are a core tool for implementing multiple use because they allow BLM to tailor

management to places where ordinary programmatic direction is insufficient to prevent irreparable damage. BLM has the explicit authority and obligation to adopt management prescriptions sufficient to protect resources that make an area "critical."

ACECs are one of BLM's most important tools for managing public lands lawfully and responsibly in a multiple-use system and to protect areas with special natural processes and other ecosystem services.

It is important to note that the Public Lands Rule, formally known as the Conservation & Landscape Health Rule, is still in effect and codifies the BLM's existing policies for ACEC designation and management. The Public Lands Rule ensures conservation remains a key component of modern public lands management and helps BLM protect our healthiest lands and waters, restore those that need it, and make informed management decisions based on the best available science and data.

U.S. Department of Interior regulations outline the three criteria by which BLM designates ACECs. 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d); BLM MS-1613, 2.1. The area must exhibit *relevance*: it must contain "important historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish or wildlife resources; natural systems or processes; or natural hazards potentially impacting life and safety. 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(1). It must exhibit *importance*: the area and its value must have "qualities of special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern; national or more than local importance, subsistence value, or regional contribution of a resource, value, system or process; or contributes to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, or habitat connectivity." 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(2). Last, it must "require special management attention," meaning management prescriptions that (i) protect and prevent irreparable damage to the relevant and important values, or that protect life and safety from natural hazards; and (ii) would not be prescribed if the relevant and important values were not present. 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(3).

Overview of this ACEC Proposal and Supporting Documents

This ACEC nomination summarizes some of the outstanding environmental values and resources of the Upper Klamath River Canyon public lands and how these values satisfy the criteria under which BLM shall designate new ACECs. Also included are sections summarizing additional benefits to recreation as a result of ACEC establishment and management considerations that offer additional context for why designation of this ACEC is particularly warranted and appropriate at this time. Two attachments present a map and photos.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES ASSOCIATED WITH UPPER KLAMATH RIVER CANYON

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC comprises 352 acres of contiguous public lands situated in the uppermost portion of the Klamath River Rim area of the river's deeply incised canyon. This section outlines the significant ecological values associated with these lands which include:

- Natural Systems and Free-Flowing River Processes,
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat,
- Scenic River and Canyon Landscapes,
- Cultural and Tribal Resources and Significance,
- Botanical Diversity and Distinctive Plant Communities, and
- Ecological Recovery Following Dam Removal.

Natural Systems and Free-Flowing River Processes

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC contains significant natural-system values associated with a restored free-flowing river and its surrounding canyon environment. Following the removal of J.C. Boyle Dam and its associated diversion infrastructure and powerhouse in 2024, this reach of the Upper Klamath River now functions as a continuous, free-flowing system, allowing for the reestablishment of natural hydrologic, geomorphic, and ecological processes.

A defining feature of this reach is the presence of substantial spring inflows within the canyon. The 2023 J.C. Boyle–Copco Thermal Refugia and Habitat Restoration Final Report[1] found that springs in the bypass reach contribute approximately 225 cubic feet per second (cfs) of flow at temperatures near 11°C, exerting a dominant influence on the river's thermal regime. These inputs stabilize water temperatures year-round, producing relatively cooler conditions in summer and warmer conditions in winter, and significantly increasing total flow in the canyon.

The 2023 thermal study further characterizes this segment as a distinct thermal reach defined by numerous "significant thermal features" (STFs)—discrete groundwater inputs that collectively create a gaining river system. These inputs, totaling hundreds of cubic feet per second, regulate river temperature year-round and result in a thermally stable, process-driven system. Importantly, these features are not isolated occurrences, but form interconnected complexes that define the physical and ecological character of the reach.

[1] PacifiCorp (2023), Evaluation of Thermal Refugia and Habitat Restoration Opportunities of the Klamath River between J.C. Boyle Dam and Copco Reservoir: Final Report, May 17, 2023.

In addition to their contribution to flow and temperature, these spring inputs form discrete and reach-defining thermal features that provide cold-water refugia for native fish species. The thermal study identifies these features as important habitat for redband trout and notes their anticipated importance for anadromous salmonids following dam removal. With the reestablishment of fish passage in the Klamath River, salmon are now present in this canyon reach, and these spring-fed thermal refugia are expected to support juvenile salmonids during warm summer conditions and, over time, may provide critical habitat for species such as spring Chinook as populations re-establish. For the first time since construction of Copco Dam blocked salmon migration in the early 20th century, successful reproduction of wild salmonids was documented in the Klamath River in Oregon in March 2026.[2]

The influence of springs on this reach has been recognized for decades. The 1994 National Park Service Upper Klamath River Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Report[3] similarly found that summer temperature fluctuations were least in the bypass reach due to stable flows and instream springs, with relatively consistent seasonal temperatures compared to downstream segments. Together with recent thermal and flow data, these findings demonstrate that the canyon below J.C. Boyle is a groundwater-influenced, gaining river system in which spring inputs play a central role in shaping water temperature, flow conditions, and aquatic habitat.

Although springs occur elsewhere in the Upper Klamath River, the abundance and volume of springs in the proposed ACEC area are uniquely concentrated and function as a distinct thermal unit within the larger river system. Originating at the upper end of the canyon, these inputs propagate downstream, influencing flow and thermal conditions across an extended length of the river corridor.

The contribution of spring inflows in this reach is also reflected in applied hydrologic and recreation analyses. The Final Whitewater Boating Study[4] conducted in support of the Klamath dam removal project treats spring accretions as a consistent component of the river's baseflow and incorporates these inputs in defining downstream flow conditions and boating suitability within the proposed ACEC area and downstream reaches within the Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC and the designated Wild and Scenic River reach within the Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC. This study highlights the functional importance and reliability of these spring inputs in sustaining summer baseflows and shaping river conditions not only within the proposed ACEC, but throughout the contiguous Upper Klamath River corridor.

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[2] Hereford, M., Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, personal communication, March 19, 2026.
[3] National Park Service (1994), Klamath River Wild and Scenic River Draft Eligibility Report, U.S. Department of the Interior
[4] Confluence Research and Consulting (2021), Final Whitewater Boating Study: Lower Klamath River Project (FERC No. 14803), November 2021. (Also available on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission P-14803 docket within the *Rec Plan Dec 2022* file at Accession Number 20221202-5208.)

Management of these lands as an ACEC would help conserve natural systems and free-flowing river processes by maintaining upland, groundwater, and spring-influenced hydrologic functions and their associated ecological expressions in this restored canyon reach. Management of the surrounding lands is integral to sustaining the groundwater and spring inputs that shape flow, temperature, and aquatic habitat conditions in the river. This management would also align conservation of these flow-dependent and process-based values with those recognized in the adjacent Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC and Upper Klamath River ACEC.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC supports important fish and wildlife habitat associated with a free-flowing river system in a steep canyon environment. The river corridor, adjacent riparian areas, and surrounding uplands provide habitat for a variety of aquatic and terrestrial species, including native fish, migratory birds, and wildlife adapted to canyon and riverine environments.

Fish and wildlife resources in the Upper Klamath River canyon have long been recognized as significant. The Bureau of Land Management identified fish and wildlife, along with scenic and recreational resources, as outstandingly remarkable values within the Upper Klamath River study area extending from J.C. Boyle Dam downstream through the proposed ACEC area.[5] These values were identified within the proposed ACEC area and adjacent downriver areas, reflecting the importance of the entirety of the steep canyon river corridor and associated habitats for both aquatic and terrestrial species.

With the re-establishment of volitional fish passage following dam removal, the ecological importance of this reach has increased substantially relative to conditions under hydropower operations. The canyon now functions as a critical cold-water habitat network, shaped by numerous spring-fed inputs that contribute substantially to flow and create thermally distinct refugia within the mainstem, as identified in the 2023 J.C. Boyle–Copco Thermal Refugia and Habitat Restoration Study. These features are particularly important during late summer and early fall, when flows are lowest and water temperatures are highest. During this period, fall-run Chinook salmon migrate upstream to spawn, while spring-run Chinook salmon hold in deep pools and cold-water refugia to over-summer prior to spawning. These habitats also support resident species, including redband trout, and provide important rearing conditions for juvenile salmonids. The availability and connectivity of cold-water refugia are therefore essential to supporting migration, over-summer survival, and year-round habitat function under

[5] Bureau of Land Management (1990). Final Eligibility and Suitability Report for the Upper Klamath Wild and Scenic River Study. Lakeview District, Klamath Falls Resource Area, Oregon.

elevated thermal stress. Ongoing restoration processes are expected to further enhance these habitat functions over time.

In addition to aquatic habitat, the canyon supports diverse terrestrial and riparian wildlife habitat that is characteristic of the Upper Klamath River corridor. The 1990 BLM eligibility and suitability report identifies the canyon as supporting important wildlife resources, including habitat for big game species and raptors, and emphasizes the role of the river corridor and adjacent uplands in providing habitat diversity and continuity across the landscape. Steep canyon walls and cliff features provide nesting and roosting habitat for raptors, while adjacent benches, slopes, and upland areas support seasonal use by large mammals, including winter range. The restoration of free-flowing conditions in the river and the year-round presence of abundant water benefit terrestrial wildlife through improved habitat and increasing availability of food sources, particularly for species that consume fish and other aquatic flora and fauna.

Riparian areas within the canyon provide particularly important habitat for a wide range of wildlife species, offering water, forage, and cover within an otherwise dry surrounding landscape. The close juxtaposition of riverine, riparian, and upland environments within a relatively narrow and undeveloped canyon creates a high degree of habitat complexity and supports species movement along the river corridor. These conditions are consistent with wildlife habitat values identified in the adjacent Upper Klamath River ACEC and Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC, where protection of riparian systems, wildlife habitat, and ecological connectivity are recognized as relevant and important values in BLM's 2016 Resource Management Plan.

Management of these lands as an ACEC would help conserve fish and wildlife habitat by maintaining the hydrologic, thermal, and ecological processes that support aquatic and terrestrial species in this canyon reach, and would align management of these resources with those recognized in the adjacent ACECs.

Scenic River and Canyon Landscapes

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC contains significant scenic values associated with a deeply incised river canyon and a restored free-flowing river. The canyon is characterized by steep rock walls, prominent geologic features, and a relatively undeveloped landscape that provides a high degree of visual contrast and naturalness. The river corridor, confined within this narrow canyon, creates a visually striking landscape in which flowing water, rock formations, and vegetation are closely integrated.

The scenic values of the Upper Klamath River have long been recognized. The Bureau of Land Management identified scenic resources as outstandingly remarkable values in its 1990 eligibility and suitability evaluation of the Upper Klamath River, reflecting the importance of the canyon landscape and its visual quality.

Following the removal of J.C. Boyle Dam and its associated infrastructure including the canal, powerhouse, and transmission lines, scenic conditions in this reach have been substantially enhanced. The return of continuous flow through the canyon has restored the visual presence and sound of a free-flowing river, reestablishing natural visual processes that were previously diminished by flow diversion for hydropower. While some evidence of past land use remains, the overall scenic integrity of the canyon is high, human presence in many areas is indiscernible, and the landscape is largely defined by natural landforms and river processes.

The proposed ACEC occupies the same canyon system immediately upstream of the Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC and the designated Wild and Scenic River segment and Upper Klamath River ACEC just downstream. Within this broader canyon system, the segment encompassed by the proposed ACEC is among the steepest, most confined, and visually striking portions of the Upper Klamath River canyon. These areas share similar visual characteristics, including steep canyon topography, a confined river corridor, and a strong sense of naturalness and isolation. Together, they form a continuous scenic corridor along the Upper Klamath River that no longer includes the presence and impacts of the hydropower project.

Management of these lands as an ACEC would help conserve scenic values by maintaining the natural visual character of the canyon, limiting surface disturbance and visual intrusions, and ensuring that the restored free-flowing condition of the river remains the dominant visual feature of the landscape. This management would also provide consistency with scenic values recognized in the adjacent ACECs and designated Wild and Scenic River segment and provide for further restoration of natural scenic character in areas previously impacted by hydropower infrastructure.

Cultural and Tribal Resources and Significance

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC contains cultural values associated with the long history of human use and occupation along the Klamath River, as well as ongoing Native American cultural presence and use. The river corridor and surrounding canyon landscape have supported human activity for thousands of years and contain prehistoric and historic resources associated with this use.

The Bureau of Land Management's 1990 eligibility and suitability report for the Upper Klamath River identified cultural resources, including prehistoric and historic sites, as outstandingly remarkable values within the study area, and recognized Native American traditional use of the river corridor as an important resource value. These findings reflect a longstanding and continuing cultural relationship between Indigenous communities and the Klamath River.

This relationship is not solely historical. The Klamath River remains a contemporary Native American cultural landscape with ongoing spiritual, cultural, and subsistence significance. The removal of the Klamath dams and the reestablishment of volitional fish passage—particularly the return of anadromous fish such as salmon—represent a profound ecological and cultural change. Tribes have been central to achieving this outcome and continue to be actively engaged in restoration, stewardship, and use of the river corridor.

Given these restored conditions, the proposed ACEC area is expected to support increased Native American use and cultural engagement over time. These values are closely tied to the natural systems of the river and canyon, including water, fish and wildlife resources, and the unique environmental conditions created by the canyon landscape.

Management of these lands as an ACEC would help ensure that cultural resources and values are appropriately recognized and conserved, including through government-to-government consultation and ongoing coordination with Tribes. This designation would provide an opportunity to support continued cultural use, protect sensitive resources, and align management with the recognition of cultural values in the adjacent Upper Klamath River ACEC, Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC, and designated Wild and Scenic River segment.

This section is intended to identify the presence of Native American cultural values and the need for their protection and further engagement, rather than to define those values, which can only be informed through direct consultation with Tribes and Indigenous communities.

Botanical Diversity and Distinctive Plant Communities

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC contains substantial botanical value as part of the broader Klamath River canyon landscape, which BLM has recognized for its distinctive and diverse plant communities. Like the adjacent Upper Klamath River ACEC and Upper Klamath River Addition ACEC, the area supports unique plant assemblages that "bisect the Cascade Mountains," reflecting a transition between montane and high desert ecological systems. This transitional setting, combined with steep canyon topography, riverine influence, and numerous springs, creates a mosaic of montane conifer forest, high desert, riparian, and oak savannah communities occurring in close proximity. Together, these conditions produce a high degree of

botanical diversity within a relatively small area. Management of these lands as an ACEC would help conserve plant diversity and ecological variation within this upper portion of the Klamath River canyon and provide for consistent management of these values across the contiguous ACEC landscape. Other land use allocations such as riparian reserve and late successional reserve may contribute to the conservation of botanical diversity in the proposed ACEC area but lack the geographic breadth to be effective on their own.

Ecological Recovery Following Dam Removal

The proposed ACEC encompasses a river corridor shaped in part by the largest dam removal and river restoration project ever undertaken. Most of the proposed ACEC area was not directly affected by hydropower infrastructure but the western edge of the proposed ACEC includes the sites of the former powerhouse, penstock, diversion structures, canal, and access roads, all of which have been fully removed. Extensive restoration actions have been implemented, including slope stabilization and revegetation with native species,[6] and additional restoration is ongoing.

This reach is now in an early and sensitive stage of ecological recovery. Riparian and upland plant communities are reestablishing through both active restoration and natural succession, while geomorphic and hydrologic processes continue to adjust following a century of alteration. These recovering landscapes are particularly vulnerable to disturbance, including soil destabilization, invasive species establishment, and disruption of revegetation efforts. Special management attention is therefore warranted to protect restoration investments, allow natural processes to proceed, and ensure the long-term recovery of native habitats and ecological function within the canyon.

5. ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Recreational Opportunities

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC provides significant recreational opportunities associated with a restored free-flowing river and a relatively undeveloped canyon landscape. The recreational values present in this reach represent important public benefits that are closely tied to the natural systems and scenic character of the river corridor.

[6] Klamath River Renewal Corporation (2020). Amended Application for Surrender of License for Major Project and Removal of Project Works, FERC Project No. 14803, Exhibit A: Definite Decommissioning Plan. See Exhibit A-1, Section III (Definite Decommissioning Plan) and Chapter 4 (Post-Drawdown Site Restoration).

Whitewater Recreation

Following the removal of J.C. Boyle Dam in 2024 and the restoration of continuous flows, this reach of the Upper Klamath River has emerged as a high-quality whitewater boating resource. The reach—commonly referred to as the "Big Bend Run"—offers a continuous sequence of rapids within a steep and confined canyon setting, providing a boating experience that rivals or exceeds that of the well-known Hells Corner reach immediately downstream.

The Final Whitewater Boating Study conducted in support of the Klamath dam removal project identifies this reach as suitable for a range of boating flows and recognizes the contribution of spring inflows to maintaining reliable baseflow conditions. These spring accretions provide a consistent hydrologic foundation for boating, particularly during the summer and early fall when flows in other river systems may be limited.

American Whitewater has identified this reach as a high-quality whitewater resource with challenging rapids, continuous gradient, and scenic canyon setting.[7] The combination of reliable flows, restored river continuity, and high-quality whitewater features makes this reach an important addition to the region's portfolio of whitewater opportunities and enhances recreational use of the broader Upper Klamath River corridor.

Angling

The proposed ACEC also supports outstanding angling opportunities, particularly for native redband trout. The Upper Klamath River in this area is widely recognized for its high-quality redband trout fishery, supported by cold-water spring inputs that stabilize temperatures and enhance aquatic habitat conditions.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) identifies redband trout in the Upper Klamath Basin as a species of conservation importance and manages portions of the basin as Redband Trout Conservation Areas (RTCA) to protect strongholds of native populations and their habitats. The Upper Klamath River and its tributaries are recognized as supporting some of the most important remaining redband trout populations in Oregon, reflecting both ecological significance and recreational angling value.

The combination of spring-fed flows, thermal stability, and complex habitat in the proposed ACEC contributes to high-quality angling conditions and supports resilient native fish populations. Following dam removal and the reestablishment of natural flow and temperature regimes, these conditions are expected to further improve and may also support expanding

[7] See Klamath River - Moonshine Falls Access to Spring Island (Big Bend Run) for a description of the whitewater boating run.

opportunities for angling associated with anadromous species as they reestablish in the upper basin.

Other Recreation and Experiential Values

In addition to river-based recreation, the proposed ACEC provides opportunities for a variety of dispersed and low-impact recreational uses. The steep canyon landscape, relative isolation, and limited development create opportunities for birdwatching, nature observation, photography, and off-trail hiking. The area supports a diversity of bird species associated with riparian and canyon environments, is along the Pacific flyway, and offers high-quality opportunities for wildlife observation.

The canyon also provides opportunities for solitude and quiet recreation that are increasingly uncommon in more developed or accessible landscapes. The combination of scenic quality, natural soundscape, and limited infrastructure contributes to a sense of remoteness and immersion in a natural environment.

These recreational opportunities are directly dependent on the natural systems, scenic values, and restored free-flowing conditions of the river corridor. Management of the proposed ACEC would help maintain the environmental conditions that support these uses, while ensuring that recreation remains compatible with the protection of the area's relevant and important values.

6. ANALYSIS OF THE APPLICABILITY OF ACEC CRITERIA

Relevance

The proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC meets the relevance criterion under 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(1) as it contains important natural systems and processes, fish and wildlife resources, scenic values, and cultural resources.

The area encompasses a restored free-flowing segment of the Upper Klamath River characterized by a groundwater-dominated, gaining river system with substantial spring-fed inputs that regulate flow and temperature. These processes create cold-water refugia that support native fish species, including redband trout and reestablishing anadromous salmonids.

The canyon corridor and adjacent lands provide important aquatic, riparian, and upland habitat supporting migratory birds, raptors, and large mammals, consistent with values previously recognized by BLM within the Upper Klamath River corridor. The landscape also exhibits high scenic value, with steep, confined canyon topography, a restored free-flowing river, and a largely undeveloped visual character forming part of a continuous scenic corridor.

The area is further recognized as part of an ongoing Native American cultural landscape with both historical and contemporary significance.

Collectively, these characteristics demonstrate that the proposed ACEC contains multiple resource values identified in 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(1) and satisfies the relevance criterion.

Importance

The proposed ACEC meets the importance criterion under 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(2) as the identified values are distinctive, regionally significant, and contribute to ecosystem resilience, landscape intactness, and habitat connectivity.

The concentration of large-volume, cold-water spring inputs creates a unique thermal system that is critical to sustaining fish populations under elevated summer temperatures and to the successful reestablishment of anadromous salmonids. The scale and downstream influence of these inputs distinguish this reach within the Upper Klamath River.

The proposed ACEC contributes to landscape-scale habitat connectivity by linking upstream restored river segments with downstream ACECs and the designated Wild and Scenic River corridor, supporting species movement and ecological function. Its steep, confined topography and relatively undeveloped condition further contribute to high scenic integrity and landscape intactness.

The area is also in an early and sensitive stage of ecological recovery following dam removal. Restored hydrologic and ecological processes, along with ongoing revegetation and habitat recovery, are vulnerable to disturbance and represent values of heightened concern.

The cultural and tribal values associated with the river are also of particular importance. The area is part of an ongoing Native American cultural landscape with significant spiritual, cultural, and subsistence value. The return of anadromous fish following dam removal represents a meaningful ecological and cultural restoration, supporting renewed cultural practices and reinforcing longstanding relationships between Indigenous communities and the Klamath River.

These factors demonstrate that the proposed ACEC contains values of special worth and regional significance and therefore meets the importance criterion.

Requires Special Management Attention

The proposed ACEC requires special management attention under 43 C.F.R. 1610.7-2(d)(3) because the identified values are vulnerable to degradation and would not be adequately protected under existing management alone.

The groundwater-driven hydrologic and thermal processes depend on intact upland, riparian, and spring-influenced environments. Surface disturbance, vegetation removal, and road development could alter groundwater flow, spring expression, and associated aquatic conditions.

Cold-water refugia and associated fish habitat are sensitive to changes in flow, temperature, and sediment input, while scenic values are susceptible to visual intrusions and surface disturbance. Areas undergoing post-dam ecological recovery are particularly vulnerable to soil destabilization, invasive species, and disruption of revegetation.

Cultural resources and ongoing Native American use further necessitate careful management and coordination with Tribes.

Absent ACEC designation, anticipated land management changes, including increased emphasis on timber production, could increase the risk of disturbance to these values.

These vulnerabilities demonstrate that targeted management prescriptions are needed to protect hydrologic processes, habitat conditions, scenic integrity, and cultural values—protections that would not be fully achieved without ACEC designation. Accordingly, the proposed ACEC meets the requirement for special management attention.

7. CONCLUSION

As summarized in this nomination, the proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC within BLM's Lakeview District supports regionally significant resources and values, including: (1) Natural Systems and Free-Flowing River Processes, (2) Fish and Wildlife Habitat, (3) Scenic River and Canyon Landscapes, (4) Cultural and Tribal Resources and Significance, (5) Botanical Diversity and Distinctive Plant Communities, and (6) Ecological Recovery Following Dam Removal.

These lands present a strategic opportunity to conserve a restored free-flowing river corridor and associated canyon landscape within a broader, contiguous system of protected and eligible lands along the Upper Klamath River.

Based on the information presented, the proposed ACEC meets the criteria of relevance and importance under DOI regulations and BLM Manual 1613. The area's resources and values also require special management attention, as existing and anticipated land uses may be incompatible with their conservation absent specific management attention under current or revised resource management plan.

Pursuant to FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq., this nomination requests that BLM designate the Upper Klamath River Canyon area as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern as part of the ongoing Resource Management Plan revision for southwestern Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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ATTACHMENT A

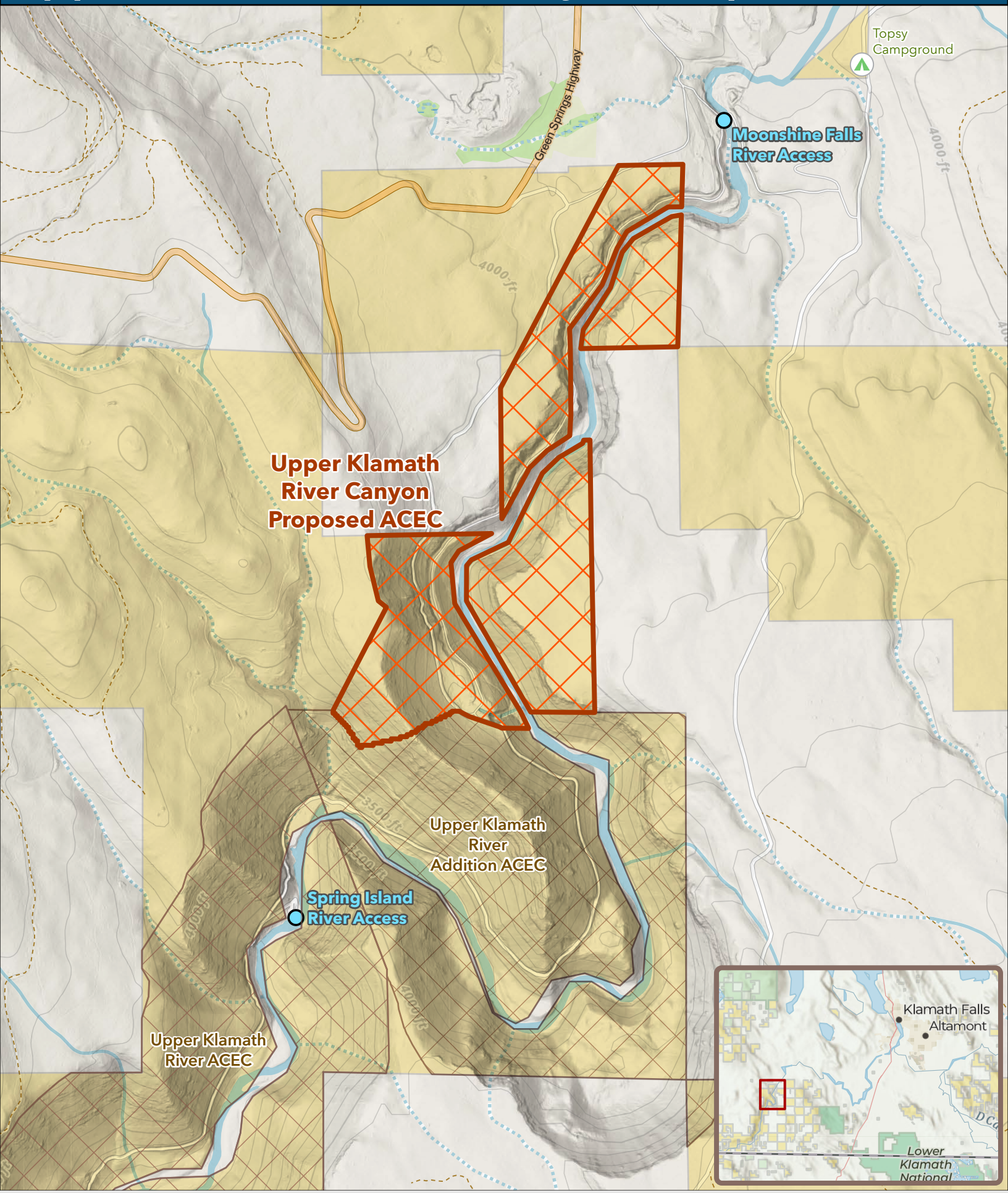
MAP OF THE PROPOSED UPPER KLAMATH RIVER CANYON ACEC

[map is shown on next page]

Geospatial data for the proposed ACEC are available here:

- ZIP shapefiles
- LPKX layer package
- PDF map

Upper Klamath River Canyon Proposed ACEC



AMERICAN Whitewater

N

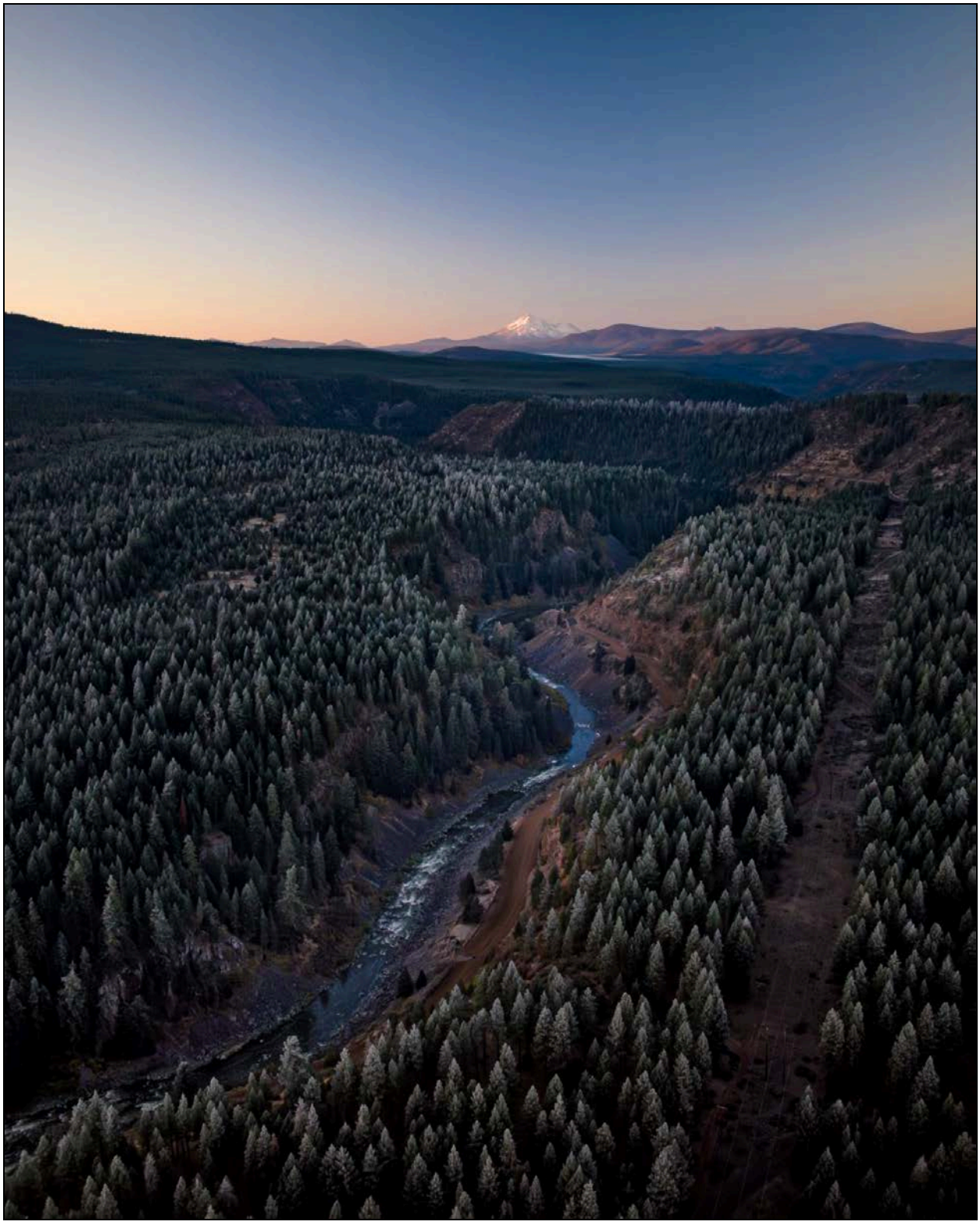
0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Map by American Whitewater using BLM, federal, and open source data. March 20, 2026.

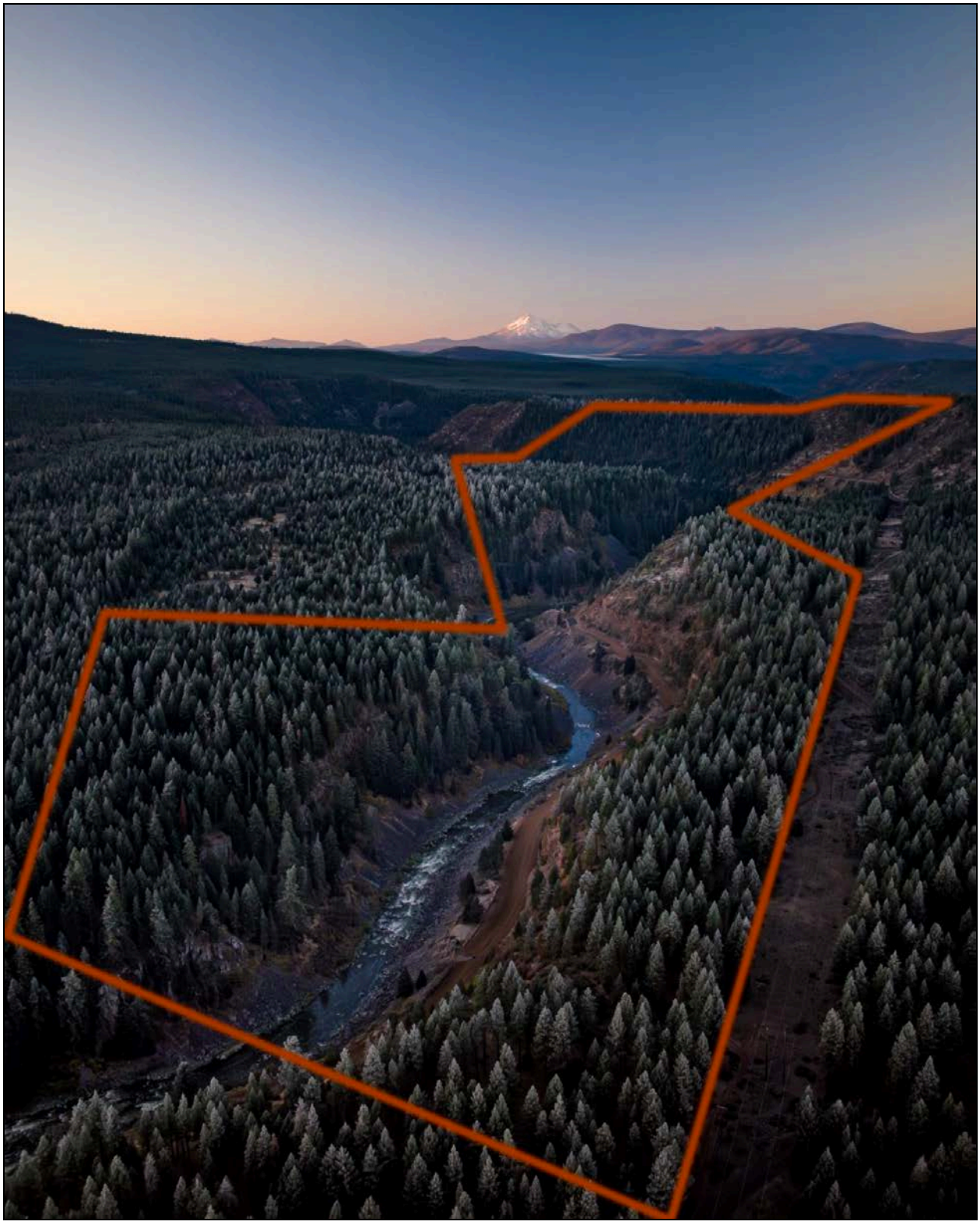
ATTACHMENT B

PHOTOS OF THE PROPOSED UPPER KLAMATH RIVER CANYON ACEC

[photos begin on next page]



View from northern edge of proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC, looking downriver along the Klamath River to Mount Shasta in the distance. Photo: Paul Robert Wolf Wilson.



Rough approximation of the proposed Upper Klamath River Canyon ACEC, looking downriver along the Klamath River to Mount Shasta in the distance. Photo: Paul Robert Wolf Wilson.

Morning in the Upper Klamath River Canyon near the downstream end of the proposed ACEC (42.105106, -122.060408). Photo: Scott Harding.

Kayaking in the Upper Klamath River Canyon near the middle of the proposed ACEC with western canyon wall in sunlight (42.109489, -122.056489). Photo: Scott Harding.

Kayaking in the Upper Klamath River Canyon near the middle of the proposed ACEC (42.109542, -122.056519). Photo: Scott Harding.

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Evaluation of the Restored Upper Klamath River for Wild and Scenic River Eligibility (Big Bend Reach)

Submitted by American Whitewater
March 21, 2026

In Response to the February 19, 2026 Notice of Intent to Revise Resource Management Plans for Western Oregon

This document provides American Whitewater's comments to the Bureau of Land Management regarding evaluation of the restored Upper Klamath River for eligibility for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The analysis addresses the reach between the former J.C. Boyle Dam site and the J.C. Boyle Powerhouse (the "Big Bend reach"), where removal of hydropower infrastructure has restored free-flowing condition and must be evaluated under current conditions as part of the Resource Management Plan revision.

1. ISSUE OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Since the BLM adopted its Southwestern Oregon Resource Management Plan in 2016, four dams and associated hydropower infrastructure have been removed from the Klamath River in Oregon and California. In 2024, the J.C. Boyle Dam, its diversion infrastructure, and associated powerhouse were removed, restoring continuous free-flowing condition to the 4.5-mile reach of the Klamath River between the former dam site and the former powerhouse (hereafter, the "Big Bend reach") on BLM-managed lands within the RMP planning area.[1]

The BLM previously evaluated this reach for Wild and Scenic River (WSR) eligibility in 1990. In that study, the BLM found that the reach possessed outstandingly remarkable values, but determined it to be ineligible because it lacked free-flowing condition. At that time, the J.C. Boyle Dam diverted the vast majority of the river's flow into a canal and penstock leading to the powerhouse, substantially and continuously diminishing flow through approximately 4.5 miles of river channel.

These changed conditions present a distinct planning issue for this RMP revision. The 1990 eligibility determination was based on conditions that no longer exist. With dam removal and

[1] View the Big Bend reach in context with land management boundaries on American Whitewater's Upper Klamath River Management Landscape Map (river reach depicted in purple).

restoration of the river, the factual basis of that determination has changed. As a result, the prior ineligibility determination no longer applies, and the reach now functions as a continuous, free-flowing river system with natural processes reestablished.

The BLM has a statutory obligation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) to consider potential additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in its land use planning. The WSRA specifically provides that rivers restored to free-flowing condition are eligible for inclusion where they also possess one or more outstandingly remarkable values. Accordingly, the BLM is required to evaluate the Big Bend reach for WSR eligibility as part of this RMP revision.

2. PRIOR BLM ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION (1990 STUDY)

In its Final Eligibility and Suitability Report for the Upper Klamath River (March 1990), BLM evaluated the reach between J.C. Boyle Dam and the J.C. Boyle Powerhouse (then identified as Segment 1). BLM concluded that this segment was ineligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System because it did not meet the definition of a free-flowing river, citing both substantial and continuous diversion of flow associated with the J.C. Boyle hydroelectric development and physical modification associated with that development.

Importantly, BLM identified two outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) in this reach—fish resources and fishing—establishing that the reach satisfied the ORV component of eligibility at the time of the study.

Accordingly, the 1990 ineligibility determination for this reach was contingent on the absence of free-flowing condition under then-existing project conditions, and not on a lack of outstandingly remarkable values. This distinction is critical to evaluating the reach under current conditions.

3. CHANGED CONDITIONS: RESTORATION OF FREE-FLOWING CONDITION

In 2024, as part of the Klamath River dam removal project implemented by the Klamath River Renewal Corporation, the J.C. Boyle Dam, diversion works, canal, penstocks, and powerhouse were fully removed. Continuous, unimpeded flow through the Big Bend reach has been restored, eliminating the diversion that formed the primary basis for the 1990 finding that the reach was not free-flowing.

Physical alterations associated with the former Boyle hydropower development were also addressed. Modifications to the waterway at and immediately below the former dam site were removed, and the channel was restored to approximate pre-dam conditions. To the extent the

1990 study relied on disturbance associated with the former canal and related hillslope modification. The diversion penstock, canal, and tunnel were removed and the impacted land on the river's western canyon slope has been graded and revegetated and is now undergoing natural restoration processes. Although the canal route is still visually discernible in places, the river's waterway is not modified by its former presence. Boulders that had entered the river below the canal route and posed issues for fish migration and boater safety have been blasted or otherwise mitigated to the degree that they no longer impact the waterway.

The reach is now hydrologically and ecologically connected, with flow, sediment transport, aquatic habitat continuity, and navigability restored. These changes reestablish conditions necessary to support native fish populations and other river-dependent resources and values.

4. STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND AGENCY POLICY

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and BLM policy require evaluation of the Big Bend reach in this planning process.

Section 2(b) of the WSRA defines an eligible river as a free-flowing stream and its related land area possessing one or more outstandingly remarkable values. It further provides that "[e]very wild, scenic or recreational river in its free-flowing condition, **or upon restoration to this condition**, shall be considered eligible for inclusion in the national wild and scenic rivers system" [emphasis added].

Section 5(d)(1) of the WSRA directs federal agencies to consider potential additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System when developing land and water resource plans. That requirement applies here. The Big Bend reach flows through BLM-managed lands within the Southwestern Oregon RMP planning area and, because it has been restored to free-flowing condition, must be considered under current conditions rather than excluded based on a determination tied to conditions that no longer exist.

BLM's own policy is consistent with this statutory framework. Manual 6400 directs that the agency's study report "address **all rivers** that possess free-flowing condition and outstandingly remarkable values and flowing wholly or partially on BLM-administered lands…" [emphasis added]. This directive makes clear that BLM is not afforded discretion to omit potentially qualifying river segments from eligibility consideration in the land use planning process.

Under the WSRA and BLM policy, Wild and Scenic eligibility evaluation of the Big Bend reach is required, not discretionary.

5. OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES

The Big Bend reach possesses outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs), including those previously identified by BLM in 1990 and additional values that have emerged or been substantially enhanced following restoration of free-flowing condition.

Previously Identified ORVs

BLM identified two ORVs in this reach[2] in 1990: fish resources and fishing. These values are now substantially strengthened under restored conditions. It is appropriate to evaluate these as (1) fish habitat and (2) angling using contemporary approaches to ORV identification. Restoration of continuous flow and the resulting reconnection of habitats have improved overall habitat function throughout the reach.

A defining feature of this reach is the presence of substantial cold-water inputs that create localized thermal refugia and increase river flows. These features provide critical temperature moderation and holding habitat, particularly during warm summer periods, and are of heightened importance in a warming climate. With the return of anadromous fish, including reestablished spawning and year-round use by salmonids, these thermal refugia now support functions—such as migration, holding, and survival—that were previously constrained under diverted conditions and unavailable to anadromous fish that were blocked by downstream dams. Together, these factors elevate both the ecological significance of the fish habitat and the quality and importance of the associated fishery, improving angling opportunities and potentially creating new opportunities for anadromous species as populations reestablish.

Whitewater Recreation

The restored reach now supports exceptionally high-quality whitewater boating. Prior to dam removal, boating opportunities in this reach were highly constrained and rare, limited primarily to short-duration stormflow releases that very few boaters were able to experience. Under post-dam conditions, the reach now provides consistent and predictable boating opportunities across a broad range of flows for most or all of the year.

The Big Bend Run,[3] as boaters refer to it, is readily accessible by paved road and a short section of maintained gravel road and is located in close proximity to the Rogue Valley and Klamath Falls population centers, making it one of the most sought-after high-quality whitewater runs in the

[2] In the 1990 report, BLM identified this reach as “Segment 1.” For clarity and readability, this document refers to it as the “Big Bend reach,” a commonly used local place name.
[3] *See* American Whitewater, Klamath River - Moonshine Falls Access to Spring Island (Big Bend Run)

region. Most boaters enjoy the Big Bend Run as a day trip, launching near the former J.C. Boyle Dam site and taking out at BLM's Spring Island River Access.

There are more than 15 significant rapids in the Big Bend reach, making it the steepest and most action-packed section of whitewater on the Klamath River. The canyon scenery is exceptional and, in places, more confined than other reaches along the Klamath Rim. The run is continuous with and complements the well-known Hells Corner Run, and some boaters link the two for a long day trip or as part of a longer overnight river trip that often includes other restored reaches of the Klamath.

The dam removal project included construction of a new river access facility below the former J.C. Boyle Dam to provide year-round boating access to the reach. Additional access is available at Pioneer Park West. These facilities reflect demonstrated demand and contribute to the reach's recreational significance and its outstandingly remarkable whitewater recreation value.

The dam removal project also included targeted mitigation of in-stream rock hazards associated with the former hydropower diversion canal. Together with earlier fish passage improvements at the same site (Sidecast Slide), these efforts have restored both upstream fish passage and downstream boat passage such that the former obstructions are no longer apparent.

The reach has already attracted substantial interest and use from the boating community and has received regional and national attention as part of the broader Klamath dam removal and river restoration project. Available information and study reports indicate that it provides a regionally—and increasingly nationally—significant whitewater boating experience that qualifies as an outstandingly remarkable value under the WSRA.

Other Potential ORVs

This reach also reflects a unique and nationally significant restoration context. The Klamath River was historically dammed and diverted for hydropower and has now been restored through the largest dam removal and river restoration project undertaken to date. The WSRA allows for evaluation of "other" outstandingly remarkable values that are unique to individual river systems. The Klamath's restoration history may qualify as such a value and warrants evaluation in this context.

The restoration of free-flowing condition has also improved wildlife habitat and likely improved species diversity and populations. Any values affected by changed conditions should be evaluated anew in the context of WSR eligibility.

Re-Evaluation of Native American Traditional Use and Prehistory ORVs

The BLM must consult with Tribes and Indigenous communities in evaluating Native American traditional use and prehistory ORVs. Although the 1990 evaluation did not identify these values for the Big Bend reach, it is not clear that they are absent. These values should be re-evaluated based on current information and consultation.

These values and others collectively warrant evaluation by the BLM as outstandingly remarkable within the context of this planning process and support consideration of the Big Bend reach as eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

6. ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION

The Big Bend reach now meets the eligibility criteria set forth in Section 2(b) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The reach is free-flowing under current conditions and possesses multiple outstandingly remarkable values, including those previously identified by BLM and additional values that have emerged or been substantially enhanced following restoration. The prior determination of ineligibility was based on conditions that no longer exist and therefore does not apply to the present analysis.

Accordingly, the BLM should find the Big Bend reach eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and carry that determination forward in this RMP revision.

BLM typically evaluates eligibility and suitability concurrently. The Big Bend reach occurs on and adjacent to BLM-managed lands, is directly connected to an existing designated Wild and Scenic River segment, and is associated with existing and proposed protective management designations, including ACECs. These factors are consistent with the considerations identified in BLM Manual 6400 and indicate that the reach is well-suited for protective management. However, at a minimum, the BLM must complete an eligibility determination based on current conditions as part of this planning process.

BLM policy also requires coordination and consultation with Tribes, other agencies, and interested stakeholders in the evaluation of potential Wild and Scenic Rivers. This includes engagement at all stages of the eligibility and suitability process to ensure that outstandingly remarkable values—including tribal, cultural, recreational, and ecological values—are fully identified and evaluated based on current conditions. The BLM should ensure that this process is carried out consistent with Manual 6400 and associated guidance as part of this RMP revision.

7. RELATIONSHIP TO UPPER KLAMATH RIVER CANYON ACEC NOMINATION

American Whitewater is submitting a nomination for the Upper Klamath River Canyon Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) concurrently with these comments. The ACEC nomination and the Wild and Scenic River (WSR) eligibility evaluation address the same river reach and underlying resource values but arise under different statutory authorities and serve distinct, complementary purposes.

ACEC designation under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) is a management tool intended to provide special management attention to protect important values, including river-related resources, outstandingly remarkable values, and the river's immediate environment. The proposed ACEC focuses on the river corridor and canyon lands that support and influence the river's ecological, recreational, scenic, and cultural values.

The WSR eligibility evaluation identifies whether the Big Bend reach meets the criteria for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The ACEC designation, by contrast, provides a mechanism for the BLM to manage and protect those same values within the RMP framework, regardless of the timing or outcome of any future WSR designation process.

Accordingly, the ACEC nomination is independent of, but complementary to, the WSR eligibility evaluation. Together, they provide a coordinated approach to recognizing and managing the significant values of the Upper Klamath River and its canyon corridor.

8. CONCLUSION

The removal of J.C. Boyle Dam and associated hydropower infrastructure has fundamentally changed the conditions of the Big Bend reach, restoring free-flowing condition and reestablishing the river's natural processes and values. The prior determination of ineligibility was based on conditions that no longer exist and does not apply to the present analysis.

Under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and BLM policy, the agency is required to evaluate all rivers that are free-flowing and possess outstandingly remarkable values as part of its land use planning process. The Big Bend reach clearly meets these criteria.

Accordingly, the BLM must evaluate the Big Bend reach for Wild and Scenic River eligibility based on current conditions as part of this RMP revision and carry that determination forward in its planning decisions.

Sincerely,

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