



Location and Background

The Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest is beginning the planning process for a paved path south of Bend, Oregon and we invite your comments. The paved path would parallel Highway 97 from Knott Road to Lava Lands Visitor Center, providing connectivity to recreation sites and other trails in the area. Maps of the proposed locations are included in this letter. These maps and other information can be found on the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57665>

Promoting active transportation options with improved safety and access to trail networks close to communities has been supported by the City of Bend, Sunriver, and Deschutes County. This broad goal was included in a 2008 report from the Deschutes County Committee on Recreation assets.

The Highway 97 corridor between Knott Road and the Lava Lands Visitor Center was specifically identified in the Deschutes National Forest Alternative Transportation Feasibility Study that was completed in 2015 for its potential to provide transportation options between high-use visitor destinations such as High Desert Museum, Lava Lands Visitor Center, and Lava Butte. That study was conducted with input from multiple stakeholders which included representatives from various organizations such as local governments, school districts, recreational groups, visitor associations, and other non-profits.

The corridor was further assessed in the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) US 97 Bend to Lava Butte Refinement Plan completed in 2017. One goal of the plan was to determine if there is a desire and need for a multi-use path to parallel Highway 97 and how it would connect to the larger active transportation network and trail system. The plan identified a significant gap in the regional trail network in this area.



Forest Service

**Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District
Deschutes National Forest**

March 2020

Purpose and Need

The studies referenced above identified a **need** for providing non-motorized, active transportation options along the Highway 97 corridor south of Bend, OR. The study also determined that a paved path could improve safety by providing a designated route for non-motorized travel.

The **purpose** of the paved path is to provide connections between high use visitor attractions and recreation sites including the High Desert Museum, Lava Butte, Lava Lands Visitor Center, and the Deschutes River. The proposed path would also connect to the Sun Lava Path (pictured in the letter header) which was completed in 2014. That path connects Sunriver to Lava Lands Visitor Center.

Additional **purposes** would be to:

- ✓ Remove vehicles from the roads
- ✓ Alleviate parking congestion
- ✓ Provide a trail experience for users of all abilities

Proposed Action

This project proposes to construct a multi-use paved path from the boundary of the Deschutes National Forest to Lava Butte Road, paralleling the west side of Highway 97. The path would be approximately 3.6 miles long and 10 ft. wide with about 2 ft. shoulders on each side. Soil would be removed and the site would be graded with an aggregate base. The vegetation clearing limit for the path would be less than 20 ft. wide. The path would pass through forest land some of which was recently treated as part of the Rocket Vegetation Management Project signed in 2014.

On the east side of Lava Butte, the path is proposed with two alternatives. The first would traverse the lava flow and connect with the wide, low section of Lava Butte Road which would connect the path to Lava Lands Visitors Center. The other alternative would skirt the lava flow to the east, hug the highway at the pinch point with the lava then continue to hug the lava flow until the path connects to the Lava Butte Road (See Figure 2). From the northern boundary of the Deschutes N.F. to Knott Road, several alignments of the path are proposed. ODOT will be coordinating with those landowners and the Forest Service to finalize that alignment. For more information on the portion of the path that is not on Forest Service land, visit the ODOT project website: <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/projects/pages/project-details.aspx?project=20714>

The entire path would have a grade of 5% or less to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The path would be closed to motorized use.

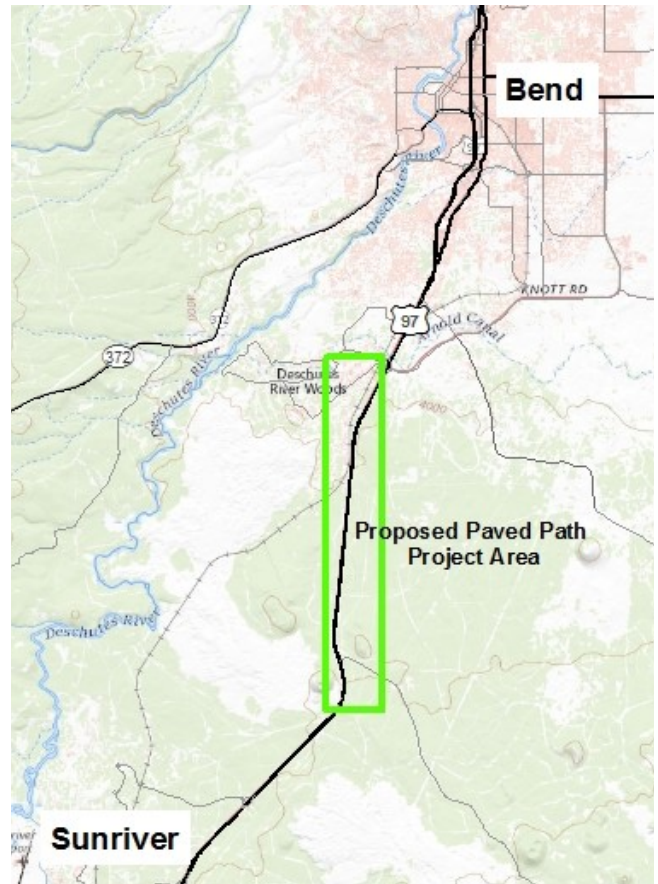
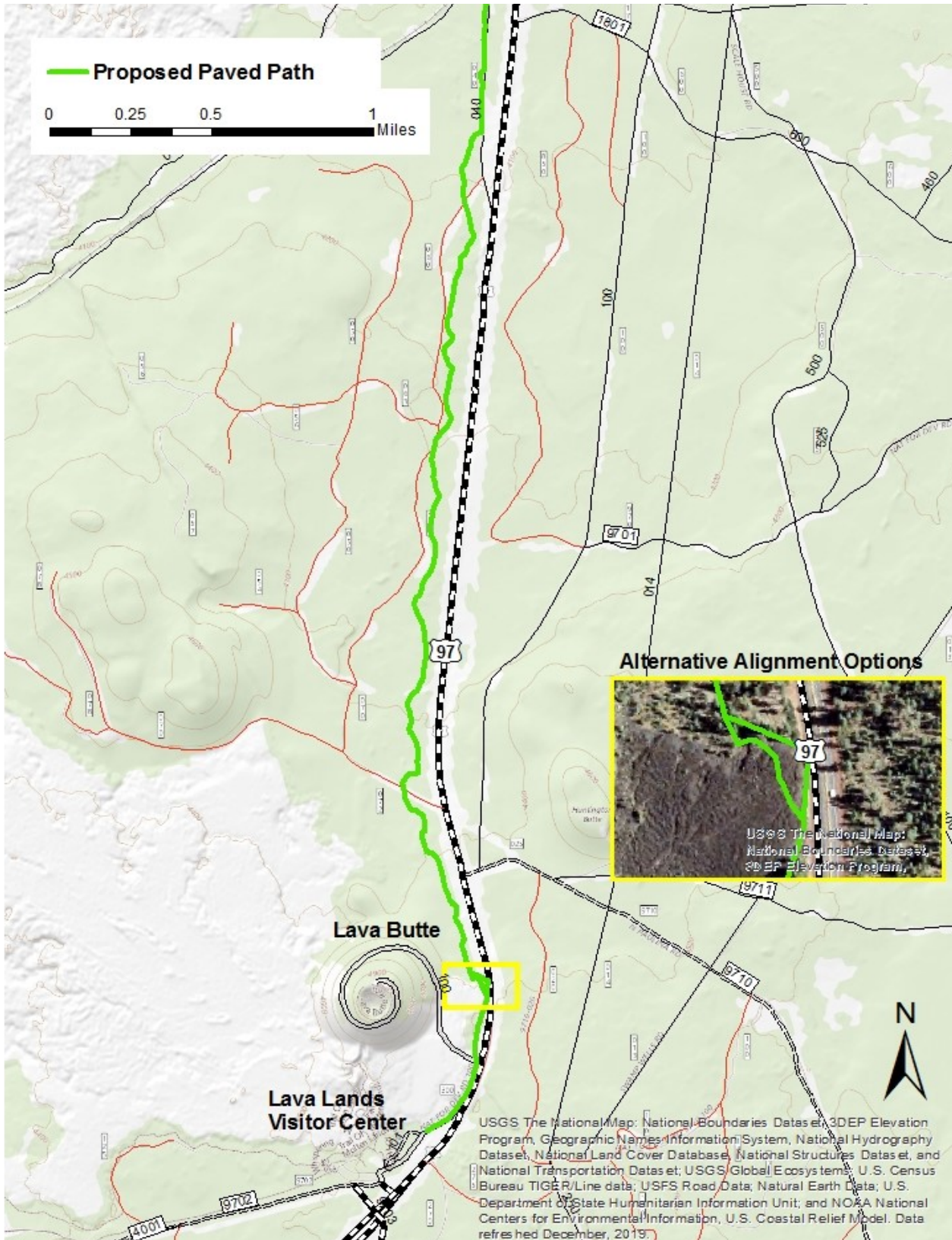


Figure 1. Proposed Paved Path Vicinity Map



Figure 2. Map of proposed path alignment



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Management Direction

The Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LMRP) guides all management decision on the Forest. It established overall goals, objectives, standards and guidelines. The proposed path passes through the Scenic Views Management Area (M-9). The proposed path complies with LMRP direction to provide additions or modifications to the trail system which will meet the increasing and changing demands in dispersed recreation, providing trails for all difficulty levels (LMRP 4-2, 4-32).



Figure 3. Lava Butte and lava flow

The path is also within Newberry National Volcanic Monument (NNVM) which has a separate Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) that guides management decisions within the Monument. The proposed path is within the Lava Butte Zone of the Monument. The NNVM plan has a standard and guideline M-66 (NNVM CMP p. 43) that states “Design and manage facilities, structures, on site controls, and signing within the Monument according to the guidance provided in the 1994 Deschutes National Forest Recreation Facilities Handbook. .

The 1994 Deschutes National Forest Recreation Facilities Handbook section for NNVM (p. 9) states “All materials selected for development on the Monument should reflect the immediate natural environment. Materials should be chosen for their natural beauty, scale and proportion to site, strength, and rustic character. Appropriate treatment of feature elements should enhance the natural qualities of the material without obscuring those qualities. For example, sanding a feature wood member to highlight the grain or knobby character rather than painting the member enhances the natural qualities.” Wood should be native appearing be considered for its scale with the surrounding environment. Asphalt pavement with or without volcanic rock curbing is appropriate for the area where the paved path is proposed. Additives such as soil, pumice, pine needles, or other that help blend asphalt to the site should be explored.

Road closures are being considered in the area to mitigate potential effects of the proposed path to wildlife. The proposed path would comply with management direction from the LMRP and NNVM CMP.



Forest Service Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District Deschutes National Forest

Invitation to Comment

We are informing you about this proposal so that you can provide comments to us. Your comments and feedback will help provide valuable information used to identify issues and opportunities associated with the proposal. Please provide feedback by April 2, 2020. If you would like to be eligible to object, you must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218.5. This letter also serves as an invitation to participate in the Forest’s National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 process for this project.

Comments may be submitted electronically to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@usda.gov. Please put “Bend Lava Lands Paved Path” in the subject line of your email. Comments must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or portable document format (pdf) only. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

Comments may also be submitted in writing by mail or in person. Written comments should be sent or delivered to Kevin Larkin, District Ranger, Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District, 63095 Deschutes Market Road, Bend, OR 97701. Hand-delivered and oral comments may be delivered to the same address during normal business hours: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Anyone wishing to obtain additional information about this project should contact Cristina Peterson, NEPA Planner, by email at cristina.peterson@usda.gov or by phone at 541-383-4028.

NOTICE: Documents associated with this project, including public comments, are part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process 40 CFR parts 1500 – 1508 and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 5 U.S.C. 552. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents or the eligibility to object.

Thank you for your interest in the Deschutes National Forest. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Kevin W. Larkin

District Ranger



Forest Service **Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District**
Deschutes National Forest

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[DR 4300.003 USDA Equal Opportunity Public Notification Policy \(June 2, 2015\)](#)

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