

## **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail**

### **Optimal Location Review**

#### **Willamette, Deschutes and Mt Hood National Forests**

USDA Forest Service

Mount Jefferson Wilderness

The Willamette National Forest, in collaboration with, the Deschutes National Forest, the Mt Hood National Forest, and the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) are providing the following document for review of proposed realignments of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) within the Mount Jefferson Wilderness. The Optimal Location Review does not replace the need for environmental compliance (NEPA). The OLR provides the basic tenants of how the proposed action meets the intent of the National Trails System Act and the criteria for PCT Design and Location.

#### **Description of the Current Route(South To North):**

The area of consideration for this Optimal Location Review (OLR) includes from the Highway 20 crossing at Santiam Pass (PCT MP 1998) to the FS road 4220 crossing adjacent to Breitenbush Lake (PCT MP 2037). The entire length of the PCT within the OLR area (39 miles) is generally located within the alignment identified in the Federal Register of Jan. 30, 1973. The entirety of the trail within the OLR area is generally located on the Cascade Crest. The only variance from following the crest is when the trail skirts the West flank of Mount Jefferson. This alignment is seen in Figures 1 and 2. 99% of the segment is within congressionally-designated wilderness. The affected sections of trail reside on three National Forests: Deschutes, Mt Hood and Willamette National Forests.

#### **Background and Statement of Need:**

This OLR has been developed to determine whether proposed realignments are appropriate to address the worst of the trail erosion issues within the review area. The USFS has worked collaboratively with the PCTA to identify and prioritize maintenance needs within the review area and parties have arrived at the proposed realignments. There are many locations within the review area where trail conditions are unsustainable with trenching, fall-line alignment, poor drainage, braiding and rutting through sensitive meadow and wet areas that are causing resource damage. With simple realignments and addition of switch-backs or climbing turns at key locations, sensitive areas can be avoided, grades can be reduced to allow proper drainage structures and grade reversals to be installed resulting in a higher quality trail experience and reduced impacts to resources.

#### **Trail Objectives:**

Overall, the trail in this 39-mile segment adheres nicely to the guidance for route selection and general location of the PCT provided in the PCT Comprehensive Management Plan (1982) and provides for foot and horse travel.

However, there are short pieces, each less than a mile in length, that are unsustainably aligned. The proposed realignments will benefit the user and the resource by moving short pieces of trail away from problem segments that have become hard to negotiate and have caused the creation of braided trails, deep trenching and significant erosion. The new trail segments will be designed to require very little maintenance. The proposed realignments are staying within the same foreground viewshed and will not degrade the visual qualities for users.

### **Alternative Routes Considered:**

The OLR partners considered other locations in general, but the existing route of the 39-mile segment overall is located on the crest, provides a well-protected, high-quality experience, and meets all the criteria for optimal PCT design. Other alternatives were eliminated from further consideration because they would not constitute improvements. Therefore the partners have focused on fixing the short eroded sections with short realignments, rather than considering a larger relocation of the trail.

The proposed realignments are located in three general vicinities shown in figures 3, 4, and 5. From south to north the proposed realignments begin approximately one mile north of Santiam Pass with approximately a one mile realignment. The next is located approximately one mile north of Minto Pass with approximately a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile realignment. The northernmost realignments are located on the slopes to the south and north of Park Ridge just north of Jefferson Park. In this area there are a total of ten realignments with the longest being approximately one mile and the shortest a few hundred feet. In total these realignments are approximately two miles.

Substantial scouting of these areas was conducted by both PCTA and USFS representatives and the proposed locations have been deemed to be the best possible locations for these realignments due to terrain, control points and vegetation types.

### **Optimal Trail Location:**

The Santiam Pass realignment (Figure 3) will function to eliminate a section of the PCT that is overly steep in soft soils, and has degraded to the point that it is no longer maintainable. Due to being burned in the B&B fire of 2003 the soils are very unstable and have been heavily eroded causing trenching and an inability to install drainage structures. The realignment will reduce the grade by half and allow for the designing of grade reversals into the trail to naturally drain the tread.

The Minto Pass realignment (Figure 4) is to address much of the same issues. This area was also burned in the fire of 2003 and the soils were destabilized. This realignment will reduce the grade by approximately half and bring the route closer to the top of the crest and allow the opportunity to design grade reversals and drainage structures into the route.

The Park Ridge realignments (Figure 5) are to address issues with fall-line routing, tread trenching, trail braiding, and routing through sensitive meadows. Realignments are to decrease grade, allow grade reversals into design, and relocate trail out of sensitive and wet meadows. The farthest reach of these realignments is less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from the current route and offers much the same visual qualities.

All of these realignments will provide a higher quality visitor hiking experience. They will also allow the restoration and regeneration of the old trail route to a more natural and stable condition thus decreasing the negative impacts to the natural resources. Through proper design and construction, the new trail routes will require very little maintenance throughout the future. This will substantially decrease the maintenance needs within the project areas.

Once the PCT has been relocated the previous sections will no longer be a part of the PCT. The environmental analysis decision will address whether the abandoned trail is to be closed and restored.

**Trail Acquisition Corridor:**

All lands with the OLR area are managed and controlled by the USFS.

**Maps:**

See next page. Inaccuracies in mapping are due to inaccuracies in the corporate data layer for trails.

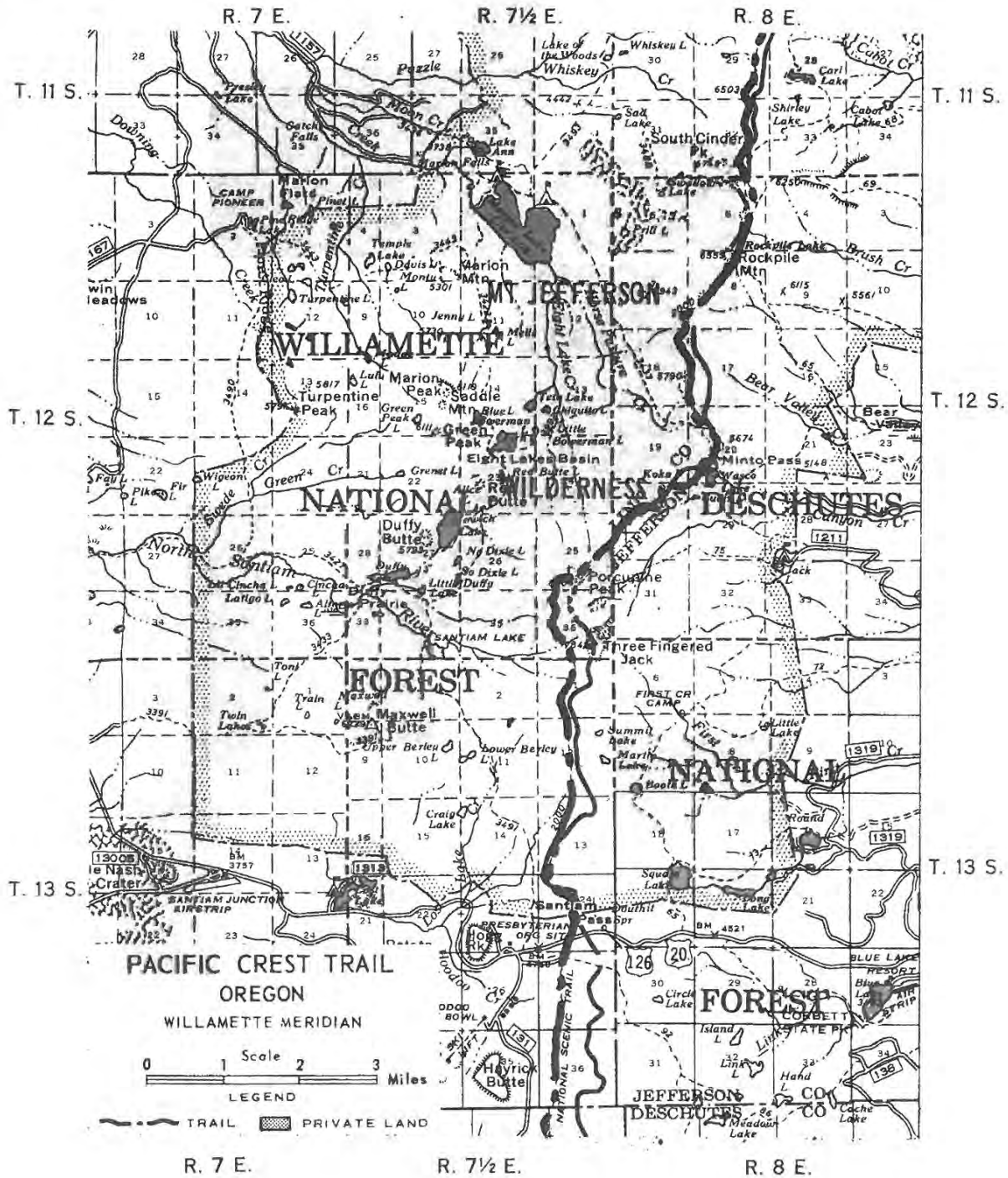


Figure 1: Official PCT Route Location

Hwy20 crossing North to Carl Lake Vicinity

Page 2862 Federal Register; Jan. 30, 1973

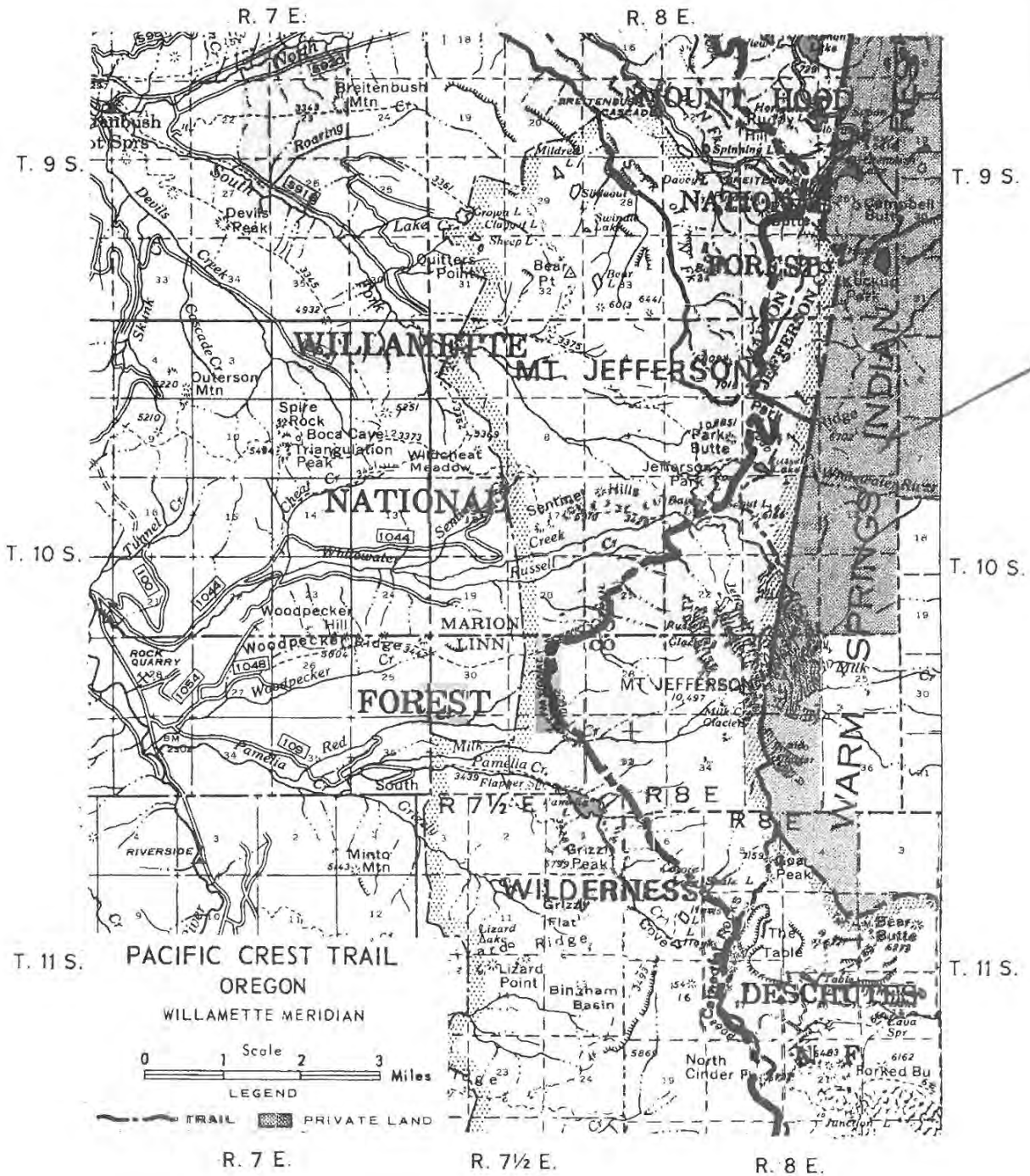


Figure 2: Official PCT Route Location

Carl Lake Vicinity North to Breitenbush Lake Vicinity

Page 2861 Federal Register Jan. 30, 1973

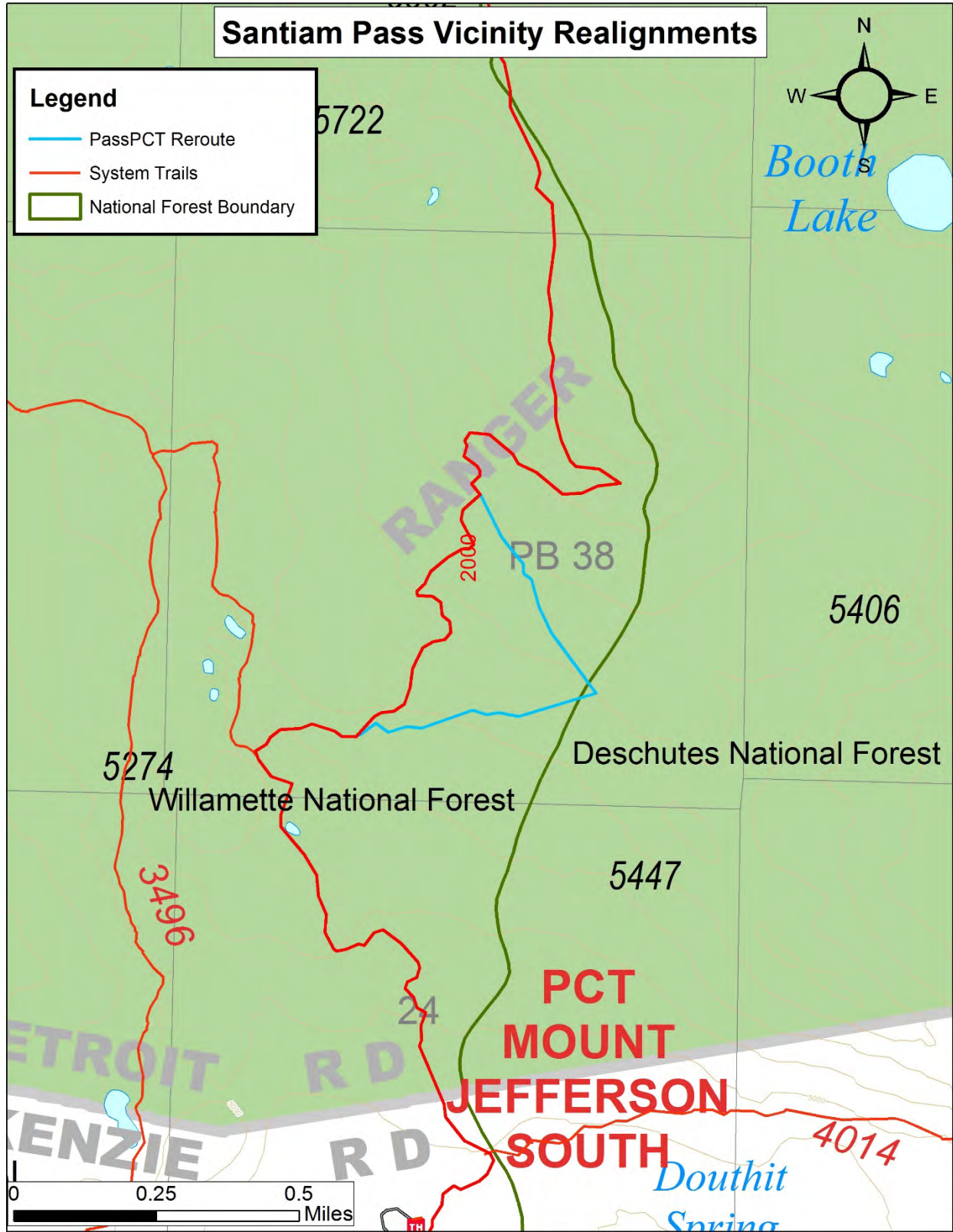


Figure 3: Santiam Pass Vicinity Realignment



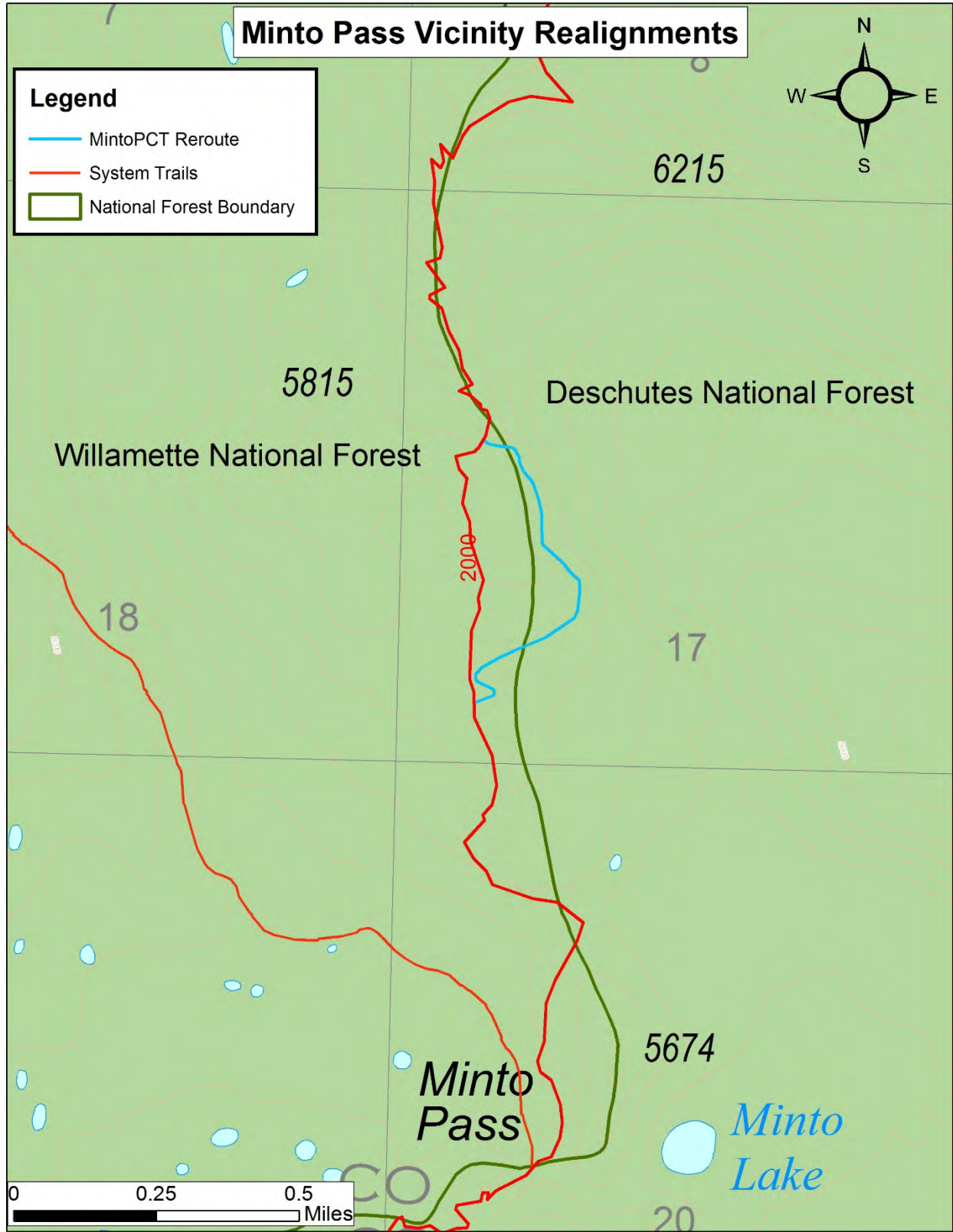


Figure 4: Minto Pass Vicinity Realignment

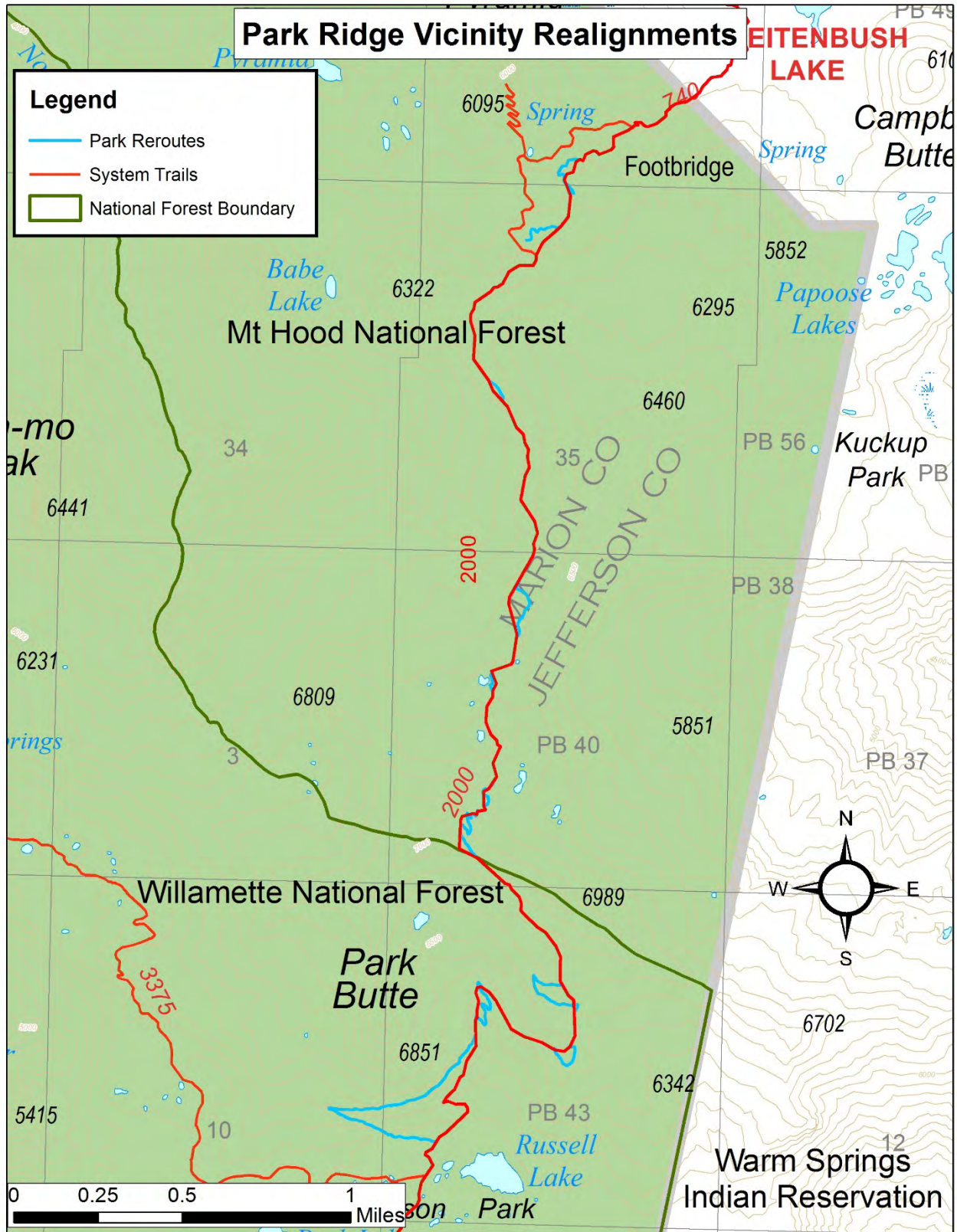


Figure 5: Park Ridge Vicinity Realignments



**Photographs:**

The following two photographs are typical of the over-steep and heavily trenched trail segments in both the Santiam Pass and Minto Pass vicinities.



The following two photographs are typical of the trail braiding and erosion occurring in the Park Ridge vicinity due to over-steep and routing through meadows with poor drainage.





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