

Decision Memo Summit Thinning

Mt. Hood National Forest Clackamas River Ranger District

The purpose of this project is to commercially thin to achieve multiple objectives:

- Reduce the risk of mortality from insects and to enhance growth

This action is needed because this natural second-growth stand is experiencing elevated risk due to overcrowding. The stand contains primarily lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir. Lodgepole pine trees in portions of the Forest are being killed by mountain pine beetle. Insects often attack trees that are weak. Thinning reduces the potential for insect mortality in the stand by giving trees the room they need to grow.

- Enhance huckleberry production

There are some huckleberry plants in the stand that could be enhanced by increased sunlight. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs has requested that we consider an emphasis on improving huckleberry production. Huckleberries are an important traditional food. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs have successfully used similar techniques.

- Provide forest products

The project would be a commercial thinning that would supply forest products consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies. It would result in healthy productive forests that would sustainably provide forest products in the matrix in the future. Not only are forest products needed by society, but also the employment created is important to local and regional economies.



Photo submitted by BARK in comment letter.

The project is located in sections 13, 14, 23, and 24 of T. 6 S., R. 8 E., WM, Clackamas County, Oregon. Stands are approximately 70 years old and were created after a forest fire. The project is in the C1 – Timber Emphasis land allocation. No Riparian Reserves would be thinned.

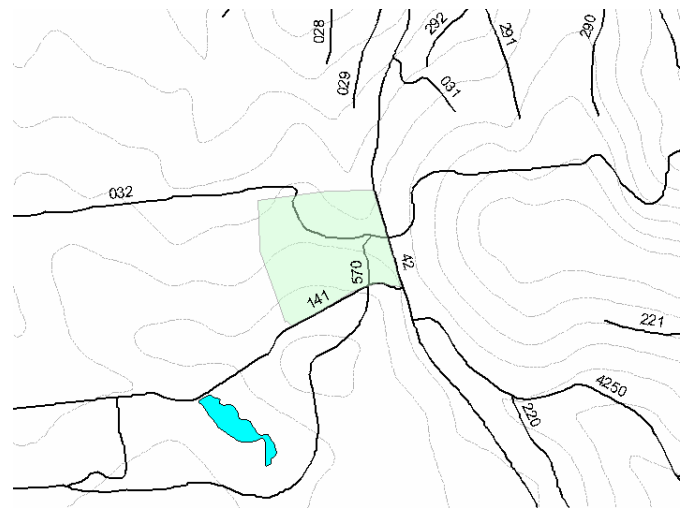
The **proposed action** is to do variable density thinning on approximately 70 acres.

- Trees to be cut are generally smaller than 12 inches in diameter with an average of approximately 10 inches.
- No roads would be constructed.
- Ground based logging systems will be used.
- Logging would be conducted in the winter over snow to further protect existing huckleberry plants. Snow plowing on haul roads would be done in a way that allows continued snowmobile use.
- Whole tree yarding would be required to minimize slash and to maintain access to existing huckleberry plants.
- Variability – Thinning will generally remove the smaller trees, but the objective is to enhance structural and biological diversity by enhancing huckleberry production through variable spaced thinning. Diversity and variability will be introduced in several ways:
 - Leave tree spacing will result in an average crown closure of 30%.
 - Leave trees will include minor species.
 - Leave trees will include some trees with the elements of wood decay.
 - Leave trees will include some live trees where their crowns touch certain key snags.
 - All non-hazardous snags will be retained.
 - All existing down logs will be retained and key concentrations of woody debris in the older decay classes will be protected.
 - There is an opportunity to enhance habitat for snag dependent species. If funding is available, two live trees per acre would be treated to provide future snags and future cavities.

Project File – Other details of the project can be found in the project file. This includes a list of standard practices such as seasonal restrictions, snag management, erosion prevention measures, and practices to reduce the risk of spread of invasive plants. The file includes biological evaluations, a silvicultural diagnosis, a heritage resource report, letters and emails received and response to comments.

Public Scoping

A notice was sent to a list of interested



groups and individuals. Comments were received offering a diversity of public opinion. Some voiced support for the project while others suggested that the project be cancelled or modified or that an EA should be written. I have considered these comments.

Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS because it fits category 31.2-12, described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, July 6, 2004. This category is for “harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing. Examples include but are not limited to: commercial thinning of overstocked stands to achieve the desired stocking level to increase health and vigor.” This proposal is to thin up to 70 acres of second-growth. No new roads would be constructed.

No extraordinary circumstances have been identified by the interdisciplinary team of resource scientists that analyzed this proposal.

- The following resources were considered: threatened, endangered or proposed species or their critical habitat or sensitive species; flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; American Indian religious or cultural sites; archaeological sites or historic properties or areas. I find that the degree of potential effect to these resources does not warrant further analysis or documentation in an EA or EIS.
- Biological Evaluations were prepared for sensitive, threatened or endangered wildlife, fish and botanical species.

Formal consultation with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service concerning the **northern spotted owl** has been completed for this project. The Biological Opinion written by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and dated March 29, 2005 concluded that this type of project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.

- The project is in a Critical Habitat Unit (OR-11). The proposal is not in nesting/roosting/foraging habitat but it is in dispersal habitat, which will be downgraded by thinning. The effects determination for habitat modification will be “Not Likely to Adversely Affect.”
- The new information that has been recently published about northern spotted owls has been considered. The new information would not lead to a change in the effects determination.

The proposal will have no effect on threatened or endangered **anadromous fish** or Essential Fish Habitat established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Consultation is not required.

There will be no impacts to sensitive species that would cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability for any proposed or sensitive species.

The project will have no adverse effects on flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; American Indian religious or cultural sites; archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.

Findings of Consistency

I have determined that the proposed action is consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (Forest Plan).

- It is consistent with standards and guidelines specific to the relevant land allocation and it is consistent with the applicable Forest-wide standards and guidelines. **Exceptions are noted below.**
- **Aquatic Conservation Strategy** – The project is not in riparian reserves and is therefore consistent with the Forest Plan as amended by the 2004 Record of Decision to Clarify Provisions Relating to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.
- It is consistent with the National Forest Management Act regulations for **vegetative management**. There will be no regulated timber harvest on lands classified as unsuitable for timber production (36 CFR 219.14) and vegetation manipulation is in compliance with 36 CFR 219.27(b).

Exceptions - The Forest Plan describes the process for documenting an exception to “Should” standards and guidelines (p. Four-45). “Action is required; however, case by case exceptions are acceptable if identified during interdisciplinary project planning environmental analyses.”

I approve the following exceptions:

The project is consistent with Forest Plan objectives for **down logs**. The standards and guidelines for down logs are FW-219 through FW-229. Similar direction for down logs is duplicated in FW-167 and in FW-031 through FW-036. I am approving an exception for these Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

The DecAID advisor is a planning tool for snags and down logs that was considered in the development of design criteria. In terms of down logs, the project will retain all existing down logs but they are not necessarily at the desired level for quantity, size or decomposition class. Design criteria #3 results in leaving some additional down wood but leaving the level suggested by the above standards and guidelines is not compatible with the projects objectives for huckleberry production and huckleberry picking. The

project will accelerate the growth and size of trees and would eventually provide large down logs much sooner than would be expected with no-action. The objective of providing long-term down log habitat will be met.

Decision and Rationale

It is my decision to proceed with this project because it will enhance huckleberry production, provide forest products and result in increased health and growth.

Comments

The proposed action was available for a 30-day public comment period that began on October 7, 2005. This comment period was provided pursuant to the September 16, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. I have considered the substantive comments that were received. The responses to the comments are contained in the project file.

Appeal Rights

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Any individual or organization that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Any appeal of this decision must be in writing and fully consistent with the content requirements described in 36 CFR 215.14. The Appeal Deciding Officer is Linda Goodman, Regional Forester. An appeal should be addressed to the Regional Forester at any of the following addresses. Postal: ATTN.: 1570 APPEALS, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623; Street location for hand delivery: 333 SW 1st Ave, Portland, OR (office hours: 8-4:30 M-F); fax: 503-808-2255. Appeals can also be filed electronically at: appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Electronic appeals must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf) only. E-mails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed, or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail.

The Appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the date legal notice of this decision was published in the Oregonian. For further information regarding these appeal procedures, contact the Forest Environmental Coordinator Mike Redmond at 503-668-1776.

Implementation

Implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the 45-day appeal filing period described above. If an appeal is filed, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR 215.10).

The Decision Memo can be downloaded from the Forest web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood> in the Projects & Plans section.

Contact Person

For further information contact Jim Rice.

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/S/ *Andrei Rykoff*

12/5/2005

ANDREI RYKOFF

District Ranger

Date Published