

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Three Rivers Resource Area, Burns District
Hines, Oregon 97738

Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record
Pinecraft Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project
Environmental Assessment

OR-06-025-059

INTRODUCTION/SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The Burns District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to implement a multi-staged hazardous fuels reduction activity. The project is within a dry ponderosa pine forest and woodland in the vicinity of the Craft Point and Pine Creek topographic areas in the Three Rivers Resource Area (RA). A BLM Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) recommended action be taken to improve forest health and reduce hazardous fuel loadings that threaten life, property, and resources.

The project is located in Harney County approximately 6 air miles northwest of Buchanan, Oregon. The Project Area is approximately 1,200 acres of BLM-administered lands intermixed with private and State lands. Additionally, it is bordered on the north and western edges by U.S. Forest Service-administered lands. Of the 1,200 acres, 732 would be treated with the proposed action; the remaining 468 acres would be used as no action areas. The project encompasses the following legal locations: Craft Point – Sections 13, 24, and 25, in T. 21 S., R. 32.5 E.; Pine Creek – Sections 14, 15, 16, 17, and 26, in T. 21 S., R. 33 E.

Project Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project is to reduce the risk of high severity wildland fires to life, property, and resources in a manner consistent with Resource Management Plan (RMP) management direction for Social and Economic Values, Vegetation, Forestry, Wildlife, and Fire Management:

1. Decision Factor: Does the objective maximize protection of life, property, and high value sensitive resources from the detrimental effects of wildfire? Fire Management Objective FM 1.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-101)
2. Decision Factor: Does the alternative maintain, restore, or enhance the diversity of plant communities and plant species in abundances and distributions which prevent the loss of specific native plant community types or indigenous plant species within the RA? Vegetation Objective V 1.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-51)

3. Decision Factor: Would the implementation of the selected alternative maximize the beneficial use of prescribed fire and wildfire to achieve other resource management objectives under the alternative? Fire Management Objective FM 2.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-106)
4. Decision Factor: Does the alternative provide enhancement of habitat diversity, minor forest products, watershed protection, and rangeland productivity? Forestry and Woodlands Objective F 1.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-24)
5. Decision Factor: Would the alternative restore, maintain, or enhance the diversity of plant communities and wildlife habitat in abundances and distributions which prevent the loss of specific native plant community types or indigenous wildlife species habitat within the RA? Wildlife Objective WL 7.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-74)
6. Decision Factor: Can the selected alternative resolve resource conflicts and achieve management objectives as identified for each allotment? Grazing Management Objective GM 1.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-33)
7. Decision Factor: Does the alternative manage the portion of 7,772 acres of identified commercial forestland timber base for a nondeclining sustained yield? Forestry and Woodlands Objective F 1.0 (RMP/FEIS, p. 2-21)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

This proposal is in conformance with objectives and land use plan allocations in the Three Rivers RMP/Record of Decision, 1992) and Rangeland Program Summary. Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and all other information gathered during scoping and by the IDT, I have determined the proposed action and alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. In addition, the proposed action would have no impacts that exceed the scope and intensity of anticipated impacts already considered in the Three Rivers Proposed RMP/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS, 1991). Therefore, a project-specific EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Rationale:

This determination is based on the following:

1. Potential effects to the following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed in the Three Rivers RMP/FEIS, and are not known to be present in the Project Area or affected by enacting either alternative: American Indian Traditional Practices, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Farm Lands (Prime or Unique), Flood Plains, Hazardous Material, Paleontology, Special Status Species - Flora, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Area.

2. The following critical element is not discussed in the Three Rivers RMP/FEIS, but is either not known to be present in the Project Area or affected by enacting either alternative: Environmental Justice.
3. All potentially impacted resources were analyzed in the EA specific to the proposed action and alternatives.
4. The following resources were analyzed in the EA: air quality, water quality, wetlands and riparian, migratory birds, Threatened, Endangered, and Special Status Species - Fauna, noxious weeds, and cultural heritage. Impacts to these resources are considered nonsignificant (based on the definition of significance in 40 CFR § 1508.27) for the following reasons:

Soils:

Minor soil disturbance could occur for up to 2 years from new construction, upgrading haul roads, skid trail utilization, and piling and burning of slash. Closure of one-half mile and moving roads in riparian areas to upland areas would decrease erosion and sedimentation. After use, all skid trails will be waterbarred and seeded to reduce erosion. Temporary trails would be ripped, waterbarred and reseeded to reduce erosion and prevent use. Some soil compaction will occur around landing and yarding areas, and these sites will be ripped to ameliorate compaction.

Water Quality:

Removal of forest vegetation reduces interception and transpiration, allowing more water to enter soils and stream channels. Increased runoff could result; however, any increase would be minimal due to soils, topography, and project design. The use of distant buffers near streams, springs, and wet areas, along with the large amount of no action areas, reduces sedimentation. Nonpoint source pollution is expected to be negligible, and implementation of standard actions in the RMP/FEIS and the supplemental Project Design Features (PDFs) in the Decision Record would reduce the probability of sedimentation.

Air Quality:

Minimal impacts on air quality would occur for approximately 1-week due to smoke created from slash pile burning during the fall. Equipment exhaust would have no effect on communities near Project Area. Dust created from truck traffic would be mitigated¹ for residents living along the haul route.

¹ Found in Section II, B.6.p of the EA.

Fire Management:

A short-term increase of fire danger (3 to 5 years) will occur due to heavy concentrations of slash in piles. This danger will decrease as needles drop from slash. Some tree scorching will result from the pile burning in the Project Area. Positive cumulative impacts on fire management are the lowered wildfire danger which lessens the opportunities of stand replacing wildfires, structure damage and would increase safety of fire suppression personnel.

Vegetation:

Implementation of the proposed action would not substantially alter the general character of the overstory ponderosa pine which consists of a moderately stocked overstory of 11 to 21 plus inches diameter at breast height trees. Tree density would be reduced to a level more in line with site carrying capacity and would become healthier, more vigorous, and faster growing. Vigorous trees are able to better withstand insect and disease exposure and become less susceptible to wildfire and drought. The residual larger diameter ponderosa pine trees would be vigorous and better able to survive into the foreseeable future. Reduced competition in the understory would speed up the growth rate of replacement large diameter ponderosa pine trees.

Aspen stands would reproduce or be replanted with aspen suckers from existing stands to provide unique wildlife habitats. Mountain mahogany stands would be maintained. Species such as Idaho fescue would benefit from the open canopy while elk sedge, a shade tolerant species, would decline. The overall herbaceous understory production would benefit in the short term of 10 years and then canopy closure would retard this production. Juniper would approximate historic populations.

Wildlife:

Impacts to wildlife and their habitat in Project Area would be minimal due to the type of actions proposed. After treatment, these stands would exhibit an open, savanna-like character with 37 percent of the forested land within the treatment area not being harvested. The juxtaposition of these untreated areas would provide cover for wildlife near the more open, savanna-like ponderosa pine. There would be a beneficial impact to those species that require or prefer more open forest habitat, while a reduction of dense cover will negatively impact some species. A short-term displacement to wildlife will occur during operations in the Project Area. In units with proposed aspen treatments, species that utilize aspen habitat would benefit from its maintenance and regeneration. Habitat diversity would be increased and would be sustainable for a longer time period.

Special Status Species – Animal

This proposal will maintain 100 percent of the existing snags and green replacements (approximately 2.5 trees per acre) for primary cavity excavators. Down woody debris would be maintained at three to six pieces per acre (Bull and others 1995). Disturbance would have a temporary negative impact on any raptors using the Project Area as a feeding area. However, the habitat diversity provided by the proposed treatments would provide necessary cover for goshawks.

Rangeland Management:

Disruptions in cattle grazing may occur if fences are damaged during logging. Cattle movement within portions of the treatment area may be temporarily impeded by concentrations of slash. Overtime, grass and forb production would increase with the decrease in tree canopy cover.

Noxious Weeds:

Soil disturbance during logging operations may expose bare mineral soil and provide a seedbed for noxious weeds. Heavy equipment and vehicles could provide a potential seed source for noxious weeds. Prompt seeding of disturbed areas as prescribed in the PDFs followed by post-sale monitoring would lower the hazard of noxious weed establishment.

Recreation:

Hunting pressure during hunting season within the Project Area is estimated to be low to moderate. Work on the site may temporarily relocate big game animals which may affect hunting success. Closing one-half mile of roads in riparian areas would not limit vehicular access in those areas.

Visual Resources:

Logging operations and the burning of slash would create a short-term visual detraction. Over the long term, visual quality would improve over current conditions through the retention of a vigorous and healthy large diameter ponderosa pine forest.

Cultural Heritage:

Impacts to significant cultural resources would be mitigated through one of the following methods: site avoidance, site padding, photographic recording, surface collection and mapping, and testing and excavation.

Economic and Social Values:

An opportunity to provide some commercial timber to local economies would be provided that may have a minor positive impact. Positive impacts include utilizing service contracts and a timber sale to reduce biomass. Purchase of supplies and equipment necessary for implementation of the proposed action would constitute an additional positive economic effect. Each stand with proposed timber harvest was given an estimated volume associated with the stand specific silvicultural prescription and marking guides. The overall estimated sale volume is approximately 1,800,000 board feet. There would be no disproportionate impacts to minorities or low income groups.

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Date