

Categorical Exclusion Documentation

A. Background

BLM Office: Butte Falls Resource Area, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: OR115-09-02

Proposed Action Title: Ranch Stew

Location of Proposed Action: The Ranch Stew project area is located near the community of Butte Falls, Oregon in the following locations (see Map):

- Township 34 South, Range 3 East, sections 29 and 33;
- Township 35 South, Range 2 East, sections 13 and 23; and
- Township 35 South, Range 3 East, sections 1, 3, 5, 11, 15, and 19 in Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

Description of Proposed Action: The Medford District Bureau of Land Management, Butte Falls Resource Area (BLM) proposes to thin forest stands, protect a meadow from off-highway vehicle use, provide road maintenance along the meadow, and remove old barbed wire fencing. The project is proposed to begin in spring 2009.

Thin Forest Stands

The Ranch Stew project would thin 971 acres of dense forest stands: 903 acres of matrix and 68 acres of riparian reserve land. The thinning would occur in 18, two-storied ponderosa pine plantations, 5 mixed conifer stands, and 1 progeny test site.

Ponderosa pine plantations were established in the 1960s with nonnative, off-site, or unknown seed source ponderosa pine which have not grown to the potential of the sites. These stands have naturally regenerated and developed into a two-storied condition with an understory of Douglas-fir, incense cedar, white fir, and a very small amount of sugar pine along with some ponderosa pine. All Douglas-fir, incense cedar, white fir, and sugar pine have regenerated from native seed sources. Most of the ponderosa pine has regenerated from the planted ponderosa pine overstory. The purpose for treating these plantations is to start moving them back to the natural mixed conifer condition that existed before they were converted to the single species of ponderosa pine.

These plantations presently have a density of approximately 100 to 150 trees per acre 8 inches or more in diameter at breast height (DBH), and 500 to 3,000 trees per acre less than 8 inches DBH. The stand density of conifers 8 inches DBH or more would be reduced to a relative density of 25 percent, or about 60 to 90 trees per acre (approximately 25 foot by 25 foot spacing) leaving an average DBH of 12 to 14 inches. All white fir less than 8 inches DBH will be cut. The remaining natural regeneration of Douglas-fir, incense cedar, sugar pine, and ponderosa pine less than 8 inches DBH would be thinned to leave approximately 200 trees per acre (15 foot by 15 foot spacing) in the understory. The species preference for leave trees follows: 1. Douglas-fir, 2. incense cedar, 3. sugar pine, 4. ponderosa pine, and 5. white fir.

Hardwood tree species less than 12 inches DBH would be cut to reduce competition with remaining conifers. Brush that meets the following criteria would also be cut: If ANY brush within an 8-foot radius of a leave conifer tree is more than ½ the height of the leave tree, then ALL the brush greater than 1 foot in height within the 8-foot radius would be cut. However, if NO brush within an 8-foot radius of a leave conifer tree is more than ½ the height of the leave tree, then NO brush within the 8-foot radius would be cut.

Mixed conifer stands consist of small diameter residual trees remaining after treatment from past timber sales. Treating these stands would improve their growth, health, and vigor.

These mixed conifer stands presently have a density of approximately 100 to 140 trees per acre 8 inches DBH or more, and 850 to 1,350 trees per acre less than 8 inches DBH. The stand density of conifers 8 inches DBH or more would be reduced to a relative density of 35 percent, or about 90 to 125 trees per acre (approximately 20 foot by 20 foot spacing) leaving an average DBH of 12 to 14 inches. All white fir less than 8 inches DBH will be cut. The remaining natural regeneration of Douglas-fir, incense cedar, sugar pine, and ponderosa pine less than 8 inches DBH would be thinned to leave approximately 200 trees per acre (15 foot by 15 foot spacing) in the understory. The species preference for leave trees follows: 1. Douglas-fir, 2. incense cedar, 3. sugar pine, 4. ponderosa pine, and 5. white fir. If necessary, brush greater than 1 foot high significantly competing against conifers and/or hardwood trees less than 12 inches DBH would be cut.

The treatment for riparian reserves located within the ponderosa pine plantations and mixed conifer stands would be the same as described above.

The 5-acre **Double Salt progeny test site** was established in 1981 by planting trees from superior tree seed sources to further test their genetic superiority. Thinning would allow the trees to reach their growth superiority in a managed condition and to improve their growth, health, and vigor.

Whole tree yarding by low-ground pressure equipment of less than 6 pounds per square inch would be used to harvest the trees. Existing skid trails would be used and if additional skid trails are needed, they would be predetermined on the ground prior to harvesting at an average spacing of 100 feet. Landings would be less than 0.5 acres in size. All trees 4 inches DBH or greater would be removed from the units. All limb material and unprocessed unmerchantable tops would be removed, walked on by equipment to crush low to the ground, or chipped into the units. Slash from all trees less than 4 inches DBH would be treated with a combination of lopping and scattering to within 1.5 feet above the ground and hand piling and burning.

Project design features have been developed to protect riparian reserves by unit layout, use of hazardous materials, equipment use, and erosion control measures. Refer to the riparian reserve project design features below for the details involved to protect the riparian reserves.

Commercial thinning, precommercial thinning, and release treatments would be conducted in a Stewardship contract to promote biomass use in conjunction with small sawlog removal to

stimulate the local economy. Approximately 0.84 miles of temporary roads would be constructed for product removal and would be decommissioned after use.

Meadow Protection

Vehicles driving off road and into a 1.3-acre meadow opening located adjacent to Forest Service Road 32 in T35S, R3E, section 11 are causing a loss of native vegetation resulting in soil erosion and the transport of sediment into a nearby Twincheria Creek. Approximately 600 feet of wood fence would be constructed along the road to prevent vehicles from entering the meadow. Also, the ditch line between the meadow and FS Road 32 would be reestablished, and the culvert under the road would be cleared so water would flow unimpeded.

Fence Removal

In the mid-1980s, grazing enclosure fencing was installed to explore the effects of cattle grazing on planted pine seedlings. Fencing was installed to manage livestock in portions of the study area. The pine plantations are established and the fence is no longer needed. Approximately 300 feet of an old barbed wire enclosure fence located in a stream in T35S, R3E, section 11 would be removed.

Design Features for the Proposed Action:

Wildlife

- Seasonally restrict harvest activities from March 1 to September 30 within 0.25 miles of known northern spotted owl sites. The seasonal restriction will be waived if nonnesting is determined. If any new owls are discovered in harvest units following the contract award date, activities will be halted until mitigation options are determined.
- Seasonally restrict broadcast burning from March 1 to July 15 within 0.25 miles of known active northern spotted owl nests. The seasonal restriction will be waived if nonnesting is determined.
- Retain known raptor nest trees.
- Seasonally restrict harvest activities from March 1 to August 1 within 0.25 miles of active raptor nests.
- Maintain all snags except those which need to be felled for safety reasons. Snags felled for safety reasons will be left on-site.
- Retain trees whose canopies are touching the canopy of a tree containing an artificial nest structure. Trees felled outside this buffer will be directionally felled away from the tree with the nest structure.

Riparian Reserves

- Store all hazardous materials and petroleum products in durable containers placed outside of riparian reserves so an accidental spill will be contained and not drain into the stream system.
- Refuel equipment in locations outside riparian reserves.

- Place hand piles more than 50 feet from fish-bearing, perennial streams and more than 25 feet from non-fish-bearing, intermittent streams.
- Use a variable no-cut buffer based on slope. The no-cut buffer should be no less than 30 feet on non-fish-bearing streams and 50 feet on fish-bearing streams.
- Construct new landings outside riparian reserves.
- Use erosion control techniques on skid trails to minimize sediment movement off-site (i.e., waterbar, apply native grass seed and weed-free mulch, scatter chipped material, or scatter limbs and other fine material).
- Allow tractor/skidding equipment operation above the slope break where slopes are less than 20 percent; generally limit to one trail parallel to the stream.
- Operate equipment at least 100 feet from streams and above slope breaks (greater than 20 percent), regardless of no-harvest buffer. However, trees may be bull-lined to the outer 100 feet of streams.

Archaeology

- Protect known archaeological sites. Buffers will be determined based upon proposed treatment, site-specific environmental conditions, and protection recommendations.
- Stop work and notify the BLM within 12 hours if an archaeological site is discovered during the project.

Special Status Plants

- Protect known Special Status vascular plant, lichen, bryophyte, and fungi sites. Buffers will be determined based upon species, proposed treatment, site-specific environmental conditions, and available management recommendations.

Noxious Weeds

- Wash vehicles and equipment that will travel off system roads prior to entry onto BLM-administered lands.
- Ensure seed, straw, and mulch are free of weed reproductive plant parts, as per the North American Weed Free Forage Certification Standards.

Equipment Use

- Require a Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure Plan prior to operation. The Plan will include, but not be limited to, identification of hazardous substances to be used in the project area and purchaser's representatives responsible for supervising initial containment action for releases and subsequent cleanup.
- In the Ginger Springs Municipal Watershed, require the use of chemical toilets at all project sites located within "Zone of Influence-2," as identified in the *Ginger Springs Watershed Analysis and Management Plan*.
- Operate mechanized equipment outside of the meadow in T35S, R3E, section 11 during fence construction and installation.

Roads

- Seasonally restrict all rock hauling, timber hauling, and landing operations on native surface or inadequately rocked roads whenever soil moisture conditions or rain events could result in road damage or the transport of sediment to nearby stream channels, generally October 15 to May 15.
- Restrict all rock hauling, timber hauling, and landing operations on adequately rocked roads whenever soil moisture conditions or rain events could result in road damage or the transport of sediment to nearby stream channels, especially between the dates of October 15 and May 15. Allow road or landing use between those dates only during periods of dry weather.
- Restrict all road renovation, closure, and improvement work from October 15 to May 15, or when soil moisture exceeds 25 percent.
- Restrict the application of dust abatement materials, such as lignin and Mag-Chloride, during or just before wet weather, and at stream crossings or other locations that could result in direct delivery to a water body (typically not within 25 feet of a water body or stream channel).
- Approve all temporary roads prior to construction. Rip all temporary roads to a depth of 18 inches using a sub-soiler or winged-toothed ripper, apply native seed and weed-free mulch, and block upon completion of use. If hauling on a temporary road is not completed in the same year the road is constructed, the road will be blocked by October 15.
- Restrict road clearing width for temporary roads to 15 feet or less (plus allowances for curve widening).

Fuel Hazard Reduction

- Treat activity slash as necessary to reduce or eliminate additional fuel loading.
- Conduct prescribed burning in compliance with Oregon Department of Forestry's Smoke Management Plan. Smoke emission control could also include conducting mop-up as soon as possible after ignition is complete, covering hand piles to permit burning during the rainy season, and burning lighter fuels with lower fuel moistures to facilitate rapid and complete combustion, while burning larger fuels with higher moisture levels to minimize consumption.
- To reduce the amount of surface fuel loadings and emissions from prescribed burning, remove slash from the site, when feasible, by using whole tree harvesting or chipping limb slash in the unit or a combination of both methods.
- Conduct a post-activity fuels assessment on all areas proposed for treatment. Modifications or additional treatment recommendations will be based on the fuels assessment and the amount of slash created during harvest and stewardship project activities. Treatments including, but not limited to, hand piling, hand pile burning, and underburning may be needed to further reduce the fuels hazard to an appropriate level within all units.

Thinning, Skidding, Loading, and Hauling

- Conduct all mechanical harvester (includes felling and bunching) operations using low ground pressure (maximum 6 pounds per square inch) equipment.
- Use existing skid roads in harvest units, where feasible. All other skid roads must be designated prior to falling timber at an average spacing of 100 feet.
- Operate ground-based equipment on slopes generally less than 35 percent.
- Scatter large and small logging material on the first 100 feet of skid trail from its intersection with the haul road to prevent runoff and limit off-highway vehicle use.
- Waterbar skid trails based on gradient and erosion class guidelines (RMP p.167).
- Restrict ground-based yarding when soil moisture content at a 6-inch depth is greater than 25 percent by weight.
- Walk mechanized harvest equipment over the slash on skid roads
- To minimize soil disturbance, mechanized Feller-Bunchers and harvesters used off designated skid trails must have an arm capable of reaching at least 20 feet, must walk on existing or created slash when possible, and must minimize turning by avoiding return trips to the same skid trail whenever feasible.
- Limit landings to less than 0.5 acres in size.
- Block skid roads that intersect haul roads at the end of seasonal use.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: *Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP)*

Date Approved: June 1995

The proposed forest thinning and progeny test site thinning is in conformance with the RMP because it is specifically provided for in the following RMP decision(s):

1. Provide early successional habitat (RMP p. 38) by precommercial thinning and release treatments to influence species dominance (RMP p. 185).
2. Supply a sustainable source of timber to provide jobs and contribute to community stability (RMP p. 38) by precommercial thinning, release treatments, and commercial thinning:
 - a. To control stand density, maintain stand vigor, and place stands on developmental paths so that desired stand characteristics result in the future (RMP p. 185).
 - b. To assure a high level of sustained timber productivity for commodity production (RMP p. 187).
3. Contribute, over time, landscapes that would trend toward a forest composed of stands containing a variety of structures, stands containing trees of varying age and size, and stands with an assortment of canopy configurations (RMP p. 187).

The proposed meadow fencing conforms with RMP direction to manage off-highway vehicle use to protect natural resources (RMP p. 63) and to increase soil stability, reduce soil erosion, and improve hydrologic functions of uplands (RMP p. 175). The proposed road maintenance

is provided for in the RMP decision to maintain roads in a manner that protects water quality and minimizes erosion and sedimentation by retaining the original crowned or outsloped self-draining cross section and by keeping culverts free of obstructions (RMP p. 163).

The proposed fence removal is in conformance with RMP direction to manage land and natural resources under its jurisdiction in western Oregon to help enhance and maintain the ecological health of the environment and the social well-being of human populations (RMP p. 20). The fence is a safety hazard to both big game species and humans.

C. Compliance with NEPA

The proposed forest thinning is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9 D(10) as follows:

- (10) Vegetation management activities, such as seeding, planting, invasive plant removal, installation of erosion control devices (e.g., mats/straw/chips), and mechanical treatments, such as crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, mowing, and prescribed fire when the activity is necessary for the management of vegetation on public lands. Such activities:*
- (a) Shall not exceed 4,500 acres per prescribed fire project and 1,000 acres for other vegetation management projects;*
 - (b) Shall not be conducted in Wilderness areas or Wilderness Study Areas;*
 - (c) Shall not include the use of herbicides, pesticides, biological treatments or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure;*
 - (d) May include temporary roads which are defined as roads authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation not intended to be part of the BLM transportation system and not necessary for long-term resource management. Temporary roads shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources; and*
 - (e) Shall require the treatment of temporary roads constructed or used so as to permit the reestablishment, by artificial or natural means, of vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover was disturbed by the construction or use of the road, as necessary to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Such treatment shall be designed to reestablish vegetative cover as soon as practicable, but at least within 10 years after the termination of the contract.*

The proposed meadow fence is categorically excluded from further documentation under NEPA in accordance with 516 DM 11.9 J(9) as follows:

Construction of small protective enclosures including those to protect reservoirs and springs and those to protect small study areas.

The proposed road maintenance by the meadow is categorically excluded from further documentation under NEPA in accordance with 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 (1.7) as follows:

Routine and continuing government business, including such things as . . . maintenance

... having limited context and intensity (e.g., limited size and magnitude or short-term effects).

The proposed fence removal is categorically excluded from further documentation under NEPA in accordance with 516 DM 11.9 J(10) as follows:

Removal of structures and materials of no historical value, such as abandoned automobiles, fences, and buildings, including those built in trespass and reclamation of the site when little or no surface disturbance is involved.

D. NEPA Categorical Exclusion Review

1. Have significant impacts on public health or safety.

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

2. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resource; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

3. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2) (E)].

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

4. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

5. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

6. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

7. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.

Yes No

Initial A Remarks: see cultural resource report OR110-09-17

8. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.

Plants Yes No

Initial mw Remarks: *no T&E plants*
protect sensitive with buffer

Animals Yes No

Initial AR Remarks: *Seasonal restriction in sections 23, 29, +33*

Fish Yes No

Initial SL Remarks:

9. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

10. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

Yes No

Initial RW Remarks:

11. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

Yes No

Initial R Remarks:

12. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or nonnative invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

Yes No

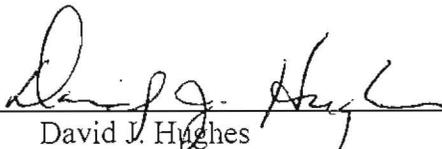
Initial mw Remarks: *with PDFs*

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment as documented in the following table. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply.

The BLM considered the areas proposed for thinning, meadow protection, road maintenance, and fence removal in this Categorical Exclusion in a recent planned timber sale and began analysis in the *Bowen Arrow/Twin Ranch Timber Sales and Landscape Restoration Environmental Assessment* (EA# OR115-06-06). As part of that analysis, the BLM completed all special status species surveys. A windstorm in January 2008 occurred prior to completion of the EA and subsequent Decision. In response to the changed circumstances on the ground, the BLM is reevaluating the Bowen Arrow/Twin Ranch project.

During the design of this Proposed Action, I gave special consideration to the potential for significant impacts to threatened and endangered or Bureau sensitive species of fish, wildlife, and plants; cultural resources; noxious weeds; and soil/hydrologic resources. Where appropriate, surveys have been completed for these resources and buffer areas have been established where deemed necessary. The design features included in Section A of the Categorical Exclusion Documentation will further protect these resources from the potential for significant impacts resulting from implementation of the Proposed Action.

E. Signature of Authorizing Official

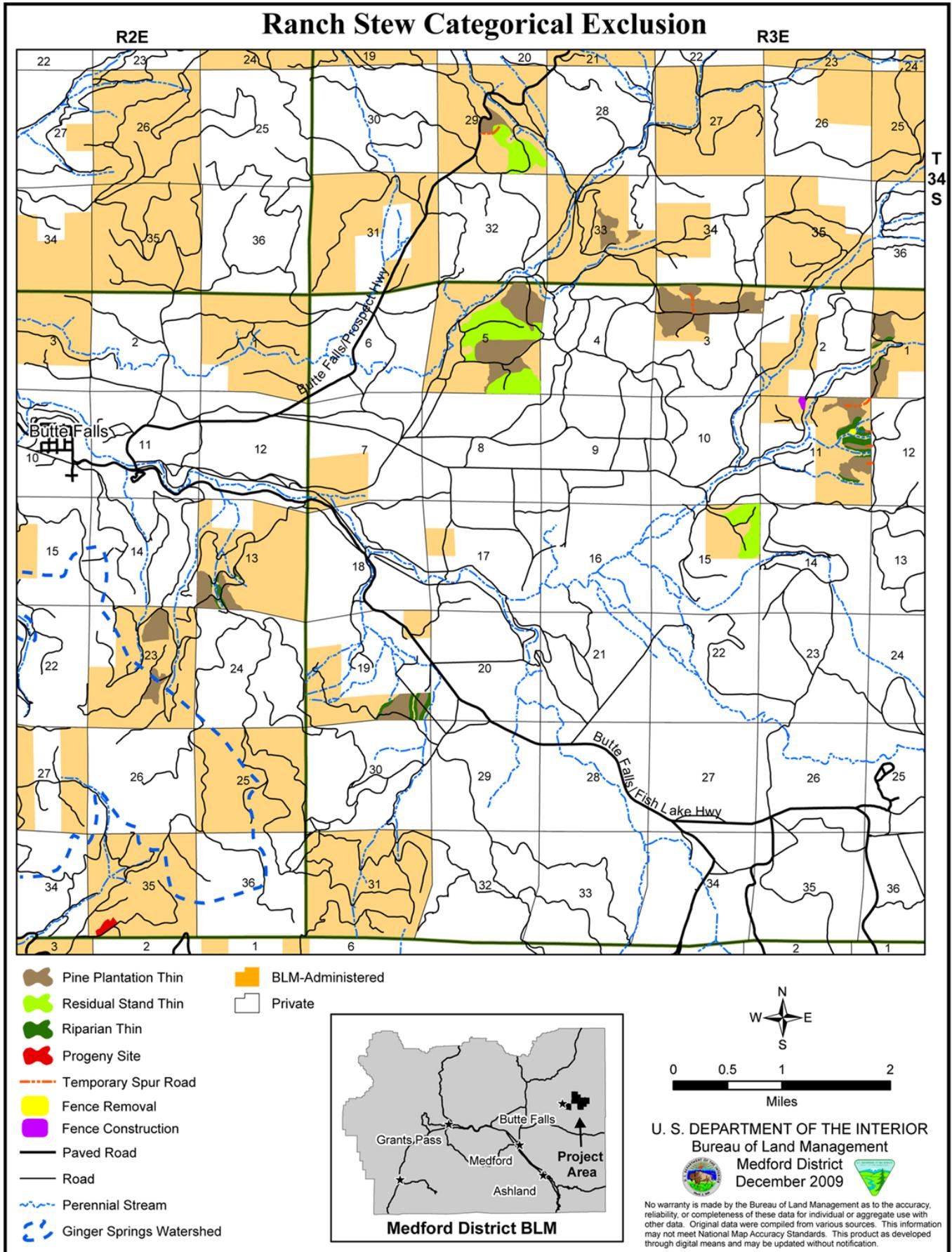


David J. Hughes
Acting Field Manager
Butte Falls Resource Area

12/04/08
Date

F. Contact Person

For additional information concerning this categorical exclusion review, contact Bill Ripley, Stewardship/Biomass Forester, Butte Falls Resource Area, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504, telephone 541-618-2307.



Reviewers:

Name	Title	Date	Initials
<i>Robyn Wicks</i> Jean Williams	NEPA Coordinator	12/4/08	RW
Marcia Wineteer	Botanist	11/25/08	mw
Dave Roelofs	Wildlife Biologist	11-20-08	DR
Steve Liebhardt	Fisheries Biologist	12/04/08	SL
Shawn Simpson	Hydrologist	11/24/08	SLS
Ken Van Etten	Soil Scientist	11/24/08	KBV.
Jessica Buchanan	Fire/Fuels Specialist	11/18	JB for JB
Ann Ramage	District Archaeologist	11/12	AR OR110-09-17 Cultural Report
Randy Bryan	Engineer	11/11	R. Bryan
Trish Lindaman	Outdoor Recreation Specialist	11/13	TL

Decision Record for Ranch Stew Categorical Exclusion OR115-09-02

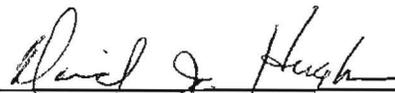
Based on the categorical exclusion documentation for the Ranch Stew project, I have determined the proposed action involves no significant impacts to the human environment and requires no further environmental analysis.

My decision is to implement the projects in this proposed action. The thinning of two-storied pine plantations, small diameter mixed conifer stands, and a progeny test site will reduce the density of overstocked stands, lowering the fire hazard potential and improving the growth, health, and vigor of residual trees. Trees will be whole tree yarded and activity slash will be treated by removal from the site or with a combination of lopping and scattering to within 1.5 feet above the ground and hand piling and burning. The meadow fence will allow the meadow to restore back to its natural condition and decrease soil erosion. The road maintenance will decrease soil erosion. The fence removal will remove a safety hazard to both big game wildlife species and humans.

The projects will occur on less than 1,000 acres of which approximately 903 acres are on matrix allocated lands and 68 acres are on riparian reserve allocated lands. The Ranch Stew project is located east of Butte Falls, Oregon in parts of sections 29 and 33 in Township 34 South, Range 3 East, parts of sections 13 and 23 in Township 35 South, Range 2 East, and parts of sections 1, 3, 5, 11, 15, and 19 in Township 35 South, Range 3 East, Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

Administrative Remedy

Notice of the forest management decision for the action described in the categorical exclusion documentation will be posted on the Medford District BLM website at <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/plans/index.php>. The action is subject to protest under 43 CFR section 4.450-2. A decision in response to a protest is subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals under 43 CFR part 4.



David J. Hughes
Acting Field Manager
Butte Falls Resource Area

12/04/08
Date