

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION/DECISION RECORD
Young Stand Management – Maintenance Brushing FY 2008
CE #OR-117-08-10

Project: Grants Pass Resource Area Maintenance Brushing (FY2008)

Location: Throughout the Grants Pass Resource Area.

Land Use Allocations: Matrix (General Forest Management Area), Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and Riparian Reserve (RR).

Purpose and Need

The Medford District, Grants Pass Resource Area is proposing management activities in FY 2008 to address maintenance brushing needs in young planted stands. Special Status vascular surveys have been completed on these units which are distributed throughout the resource area. The units are in need of maintenance brushing due to vegetation competition and overstocked conditions. These stand conditions can lead to conifers exhibiting declining vigor with an increased probability of disease or insect infestations. In addition, these dense young stands can have higher fuel hazard with crowns and fuel ladders close to the ground, abundant fuel loadings, and young stems with thin, non-fire resistant bark.

Objectives of young stand management include the following as described in the Medford District Resource Management Plan (p. 183). Thinning and release treatment of these stands will accelerate stand development, create more fire resistant stands with larger trees which have thicker, more fire resistant bark, and reduce fuel ladders and stand densities, all of which help reduce the probability of a stand replacement fire. The goal of the project is to improve growth of brushed/thinned stands, shift stand species composition and structure to desired conditions (as defined by NWFP (Northwest Forest Plan) and Medford District Resource Management Plan land allocation objectives), and reduce activity fuels in the treated stands.

Proposed treatments would help young stands (generally 10-35 years old) develop improved vigor, greater resistance to disturbance, and desired species composition and structure. Proposed treatments include early stand maintenance brushing. Young stand management (YSM) treatments would occur over a one year period (FY 2008) on approximately 117 acres.

Proposed Action

Proposed treatments in young stands can include a wide variety of treatments including tree planting, mulching and/or scalping, netting, maintenance brushing, pre-commercial thinning/release, and pruning.

All units proposed for maintenance brushing are in past timber harvest units. Approximately 117 acres are proposed for brushing (Table 1). Many of the units have conifers 2 to 15 feet tall. All brush and excess vegetation would be cut using chainsaws. No conifers will be cut.

Hardwoods <12" DBH will be cut unless they are needed to maintain approximately 30'x 30' spacing or to meet other ecological objectives based on site-specific conditions. All cut trees will be lopped and bucked to ≤ 8 foot lengths and would be limbed as necessary to be ≤ 2 feet from the ground surface.

Hardwood retention priority would be: 1) black and/or white oak, 2) Pacific madrone, 3) golden chinquapin, and 4) canyon live oak. All dogwood, big leaf maple and elderberry will be retained. All brush species (except elderberry) will be cut. Tree spacing will be varied up to 25% of spacing requirements in order to leave the most vigorous and desired tree species.

The straightest stems with the largest diameter at 2 feet above ground level and the best formed crowns with origins closest to the base of the stump will be selected for leave within sprout clumps.

Riparian reserves will have no-treatment buffers (25 feet each side of intermittent and 50 feet each side of perennial streams). Outside of the no-treatment buffers, riparian reserves will be brushed or thinned as described above.

Project Design Features

Slash will be lopped and scattered with a maximum slash height of 2 feet. Slash would be cleared within 15 feet of roads.

All special status plants, including threatened or endangered (T&E) and state listed species would be identified and protected according to species-specific management guidelines.

Prior to treatment, units will be surveyed for the presence of noxious weeds. At the task order pre-work conference, the COR will identify priority areas, by silviculture unit and watershed, which have the presence of noxious weeds.

Noxious weed identification will be briefly covered by the COR at the task order pre-work conference. The COR will also identify which measures shall be utilized to prevent spreading noxious weeds into non-infested areas. These measures will be consistent with the Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998).

Measures may include limited access or egress routes on natural surface roads to units during wet weather (when water puddles on the road), development of a sequential treatment plan so non-infested noxious weed units are treated prior to infested units, or utilization of other noxious weed avoidance strategies. In areas with high concentrations of noxious weeds and where there is a high likelihood of spreading noxious weed seed to non-infested areas, vehicles may be required to be taken through a vehicle washing station after leaving an area infested with noxious weeds and prior to entry into a non-infested area.

All ground disturbing equipment used on BLM lands must be washed prior to entering BLM lands and when moving from known noxious weed areas to weed-free areas to remove any dirt or vegetation that may harbor noxious weed seed. Certain conditions, such as amount and type of noxious weed infestation, time of noxious weed seed dispersal, time of year, road and soil conditions, and weather will have a major effect on whether vehicle washing shall be required.

Port-Orford-cedar (POC) in the project area will be managed according the 2004 BLM POC FSEIS/ROD. The FEIS for Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in Southwest Oregon provides a risk key for management within the natural range of POC. The status of POC in the project area is dynamic; therefore, a risk key will be done prior to issuing each task order so that decisions on mitigation measures are based on the most current resource information.

An initial risk key evaluation was done to identify potential mitigation measures for a range of conditions in the activity areas. See attachment # 1 & 2. These mitigations are as follows:

- Prior to entering a POC area or leaving a *Phytophthora lateralis* (PL) area, all vehicles will be washed according to Management Guidelines provided by the Port-Orford Range-wide Assessment (USDA, USDI Goheen, Betlejewski and Angwin 2003). This includes summer rain events which create standing puddles.
- Unit scheduling will be done to prevent moving from an infested area to an uninfested area.
- To limit the potential for PL spread, access and egress routes and parking areas will be designated by the BLM contractor representatives.
- Whenever possible, activities will be limited to the dry season when operating in POC areas.

Chainsaw activities would not occur within ¼ mile of a known spotted owl site from March 1 through June 30.

Chainsaw activities would not occur within 1/4 mile (1/2 mile line-of-site) of occupied Bald Eagle nests or important roosts from January 1 to August 31.

Protect other raptor species, if located, with appropriate seasonal restrictions.

Seasonal restrictions may be waived by an agency wildlife biologist if surveys demonstrate the nest or roost site is not being used, the use of the site has ended for the year, or the noise disturbance from the activity would be blocked by topographic features.

Prior to treatment, project areas would be reviewed by Grants Pass Resource Area specialists for necessary clearances. Required surveys would be completed and appropriate buffers as per management recommendations would be incorporated into the project.

For Special Status species, the size of the protection buffer will be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the species and its habitat requirements, but will be a minimum of a 20 feet radius for sensitive species.

The project design criteria (PDC) for T&E listed species (*Fritillaria gentneri* and *Lomatium cookii*) are provided in the FY04-08 Rogue River/South Coast Biological Opinion. The following PDC will be followed for all project activities:

- (1) Buffer sizes: a minimum of 25 feet radius from the population boundary (a site or the outer edge of a polygon encompassing the population). No activity within the buffer outside the dormancy period. Buffers can be treated manually during the dormancy period (September – February).
- (2) Known occurrences can be treated (burning, hand brush/tree removal, sowing adapted native grasses etc) during the dormancy period if the net result improves habitat for the species.
- (3) No tree falling into or yarding through buffered sites.
- (4) Temporary roads would be surveyed and populations protected by a minimum 100 feet radius buffer. Use of existing roads within 100 feet of occurrence is allowed.
- (5) Firewood collection would not be permitted within buffers. Road segments close to known occurrences may need to be closed to prevent incidental impacts.
- (6) Cut materials must be piled outside the buffers.
- (7) No tree planting or mechanical scalping in or within 75 feet of the buffer edge (100 feet from occurrence) so as to maintain more open habitat.
- (8) No heavy equipment (dozers, machine masticator, excavators etc) within known sites.

Land Use Plan Conformance

The actions proposed and analyzed in this CE were developed to be consistent with the management objectives for public lands identified in the following documents:

1. Final EIS and ROD for the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (1995)
2. Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994)
3. ROD for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (1994)
4. Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998)
5. ROD for Management of Port-Orford Cedar in Southwest Oregon (2004)
6. ROD to Remove the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines (2007)

In addition to the documents cited above, project planning drew from information and recommendations from the following:

1. BLM Manual 6840 – Special Status Species Management (2001)
2. USFWS Letter of Concurrence for Medford BLM FY 2008 (Log #1-15-06-I-165) (2007)

**NEPA COMPLIANCE
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW
Young Stand Management – Maintenance Brushing FY 2008
CE #OR117-08-10**

The Department of the Interior Manual 516 2.3A (3) requires the review of the following “extraordinary circumstances” (516 DM 2 Appendix 2) to determine if an otherwise categorically excluded action would require additional analysis and environmental documentation.

1) Have significant impacts on public health or safety.

No

2) Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; 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.

No

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

No

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

No

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

No

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

No

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.

No

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.

No

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

No

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

No

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).

No

12) Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native 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).

No

Reviewers:

Steve W. Scholten 5/13/08
Silviculture, Vegetation Dynamics Date

Steve W. Scholten 5/13/08
Port-Orford Cedar Date

John M. S. Jr 5/7/2008
Botany Date

Timothy 5/7/08
Cultural Resources Date

Jon Ransom 5/1/08
Fisheries Date

Jason Reef 5/1/08
Wildlife Date

Michael DeBlasi 5/7/08
Soils/Hydrology Date

J. Miller 5/7/08
Visual Resources / Recreation Date

James R. Roper 5/5/08
Engineering Date

Ken 5/5/08
Fire and Fuels Date

Table 1 - Maintenance Brushing Units FY 2008

<i>Land Use Allocation</i>	<i>TRSU</i>	<i>OI_Key</i>	<i>Unit Name</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Fiscal</i>	<i>Watershed</i>	<i>Acres</i>
<i>Adaptive Management Areas</i>							
	39S-05W-7-010	165027	Cedar Flat Fire	010	2008	Williams Creek	38
Sum							38
<i>Late-Successional Reserves</i>							
	35S-09W-10-009	113104	115176 Sourgrass 10-1	009 010	2008	Silver Creek	50
	35S-09W-3-009	115175	Sourgrass 11-1	009	2008	Silver Creek	6
Sum							56
<i>Northern Gen. Forest Management Areas</i>							
	35S-09W-21-005	113815	Silver Spur 21	005	2008	Silver Creek	14
Sum							14
<i>Southern Gen. Forest Management Areas</i>							
	40S-08W-3-005	116675	Nor East 3-4	005	2008	East Fork Illinois River	9
Sum							9
Grand Total							117