

Forestry Categorical Exclusion Documentation

A. Background:

BLM Office: Vale District Bureau of Land Management – Malheur Resource Area
100 Oregon Street, Vale, Oregon 97918
Phone: 541-473-3144

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: **CX Log #: OR-030-044**

Proposed Action Title: Irish Springs Salvage

Location of Proposed Action: T. 16 S., R. 38 E., Sec. 9, 10 & 11

Description of Proposed Action: The proposal is to harvest up to 200 acres of timber killed as a result of the Irish Springs Complex Fire that burned in August of 2007. With the exception of one small area approximately five acres in size, any tree showing any amount of green foliage would not be cut. The small area referenced is a densely stocked patch of small diameter Douglas-fir that has been heavily scorched. This patch would be thinned to a basal area stocking of 60 square feet per acre to reduce competition between scorched trees and increase the possibility of survival for the remaining trees. The fire killed timber is located in Rail Canyon and Cottonwood Creek: two neighboring intermittent drainages that are separated by an unnamed ridge forming the hydrologic divide. Rail Canyon is a tributary of the Bully Drainage hydrologic unit and Cottonwood Creek is a tributary of the Willow Drainage hydrologic unit. Logging would likely commence in the spring of 2008 and conclude either prior to, or during the summer of 2008. Logging would not occur in Rail Canyon during the spring of 2008. If the BLM determines that soil conditions are appropriate (frozen or low moisture content), logging may continue in the Cottonwood drainage during the spring of 2008. Ground based logging systems would be used on all harvest areas. Overall, less than 0.5% of BLM managed Public Lands that burned in the Irish Springs Fire would be harvested under this proposal. The remaining areas are non-forested, unfeasible, inaccessible, or would be reserved to protect other resource values such as: VRM, ACEC, fisheries, hydrology and soil stability. A maximum of 0.5 mile of temporary road construction would be permitted. Landings would be located directly adjacent to existing improved and unimproved roads. Maintenance of some unimproved roads may be required. Harvested areas may be reforested in the spring of 2009. Rehabilitation activities, as addressed in the Burn Area Rehabilitation Plan, are being addressed under a separate environmental assessment. Rehabilitation work would include seeding, reforestation, slope stabilization, and channel stabilization.

Design Features

Access- Up to 0.5 mile of temporary road construction is permissible under this CX, but it doesn't appear to be necessary to facilitate harvest operations; thus only existing roads would be used for all harvest activities. Road maintenance would occur only when weather and soil moisture conditions are suitable.

Cultural resources – The BLM has completed a cultural resource inventory of the proposed harvest areas. One cultural site was identified and although it is not located within a proposed harvest unit, a BLM archaeologist has established a no-entry buffer to ensure the site is not accidentally impacted.

Fuels Treatment – Weighing the benefits that coarse woody debris (CWD) provides to wildlife, soil productivity and erosion abatement against the negative effects of fire severity, resistance to control and soil heating that could result in a reburn scenario, optimum CWD amounts would range from 5 to 20 tons per acre as described in *Coarse Woody Debris: Managing Benefits and Fire Hazard in the Recovering Forest*, (Brown, et. al., July 2003). The recommended CWD target from the Southeastern Oregon RMP/ROD (SEORMP) (September, 2002), Appendix F12 and described below in *Snag, Down Log and Green Tree Retention* would approximate 8 to 10 tons per acre, which allows for an additional post harvest fuel loading of 10 tons per acre. Since most ground fuels were consumed in the fire, this would be in the form of activity generated slash and future deadfall of unmerchantable, fire-killed trees. The Purchaser would lop and scatter activity slash or pile it at landings if whole-tree yarding is employed. If BLM post-activity fuel surveys find that fuel loads and arrangements are unacceptable, BLM may masticate or pile slash for burning at a later date.

Noxious Weeds – The BLM has surveyed the proposed salvage logging area for noxious weeds and areas of weed infestation have been found. Prior to implementation, forestry staff would coordinate activities with the resource area weed specialist to identify site specific actions (i.e. vehicle washing, areas to avoid vehicle parking etc.) necessary to avoid spread of noxious weeds. BLM would monitor treated areas for noxious weed establishment.

Riparian Conservation Areas (RCA's) – Prior to the fire, neither Cottonwood Creek nor Rail Canyon intermittent streams were in a proper functioning condition (PFC), nor was either stream attaining riparian management objectives (RMO's) as described in the SEORMP, Appendices D1 and D3 respectively. The effect of the wildfire has set these streams further back from attaining these goals. Default RCA's of 120 feet are established for these streams per Appendix D2 of the SEORMP and normally any activity would be avoided within these areas. However, since these drainages are in such poor condition, salvage operations would be permitted within the RCA's with the caveat that design features are included in this proposal to facilitate attainment of RMO's after completing salvage operations. Design features would include the following:

Channel Crossings – The Purchaser would place log culverts in any necessary channel crossings and remove them upon completion of salvage operations. Log culverts would consist of logs stacked in the channel from top to bottom and flush with the top of the bank to prevent bank failure. Crossings would be kept to the minimum necessary and every attempt would be made to restrict crossings to areas where the channel is poorly, or not at all, defined.

Headcut Armoring (Rail Canyon) – To prevent further stream channel headcutting, the Purchaser would place logs and slash flush to the ground and perpendicular to the channel from the top of the headcut and extending upstream for 15 to 20 yards. The Purchaser would also place logs in the channel directly below the headcut, with the proximal ends flush with the top and keyed into the soil of the headcut and the distal ends sloping down to the base level of the channel downstream. This design feature should dissipate the energy of flowing water during the runoff period (spring) and hopefully collect sediment to stop the headcut and begin reestablishing bank stability.

Perpendicular Felling – To further promote attainment of RMO's, the Purchaser would fell or place approximately 20 trees or logs per mile (one tree every 250 feet) as CWD into the primary floodplains and/or channels, as prescribed in Appendix D3 of the SEORMP. CWD is an important component of instream habitat features (RMO criteria) and is currently absent from both riparian areas. The CWD would be angled upstream to promote sediment trapping and pool formation.

Sensitive species habitat – The forest structure that existed in the proposed salvage units prior to the fire was likely suitable for northern goshawks. However, the BLM had no record of goshawks or any other sensitive species occupying these sites. Since the proposed salvage units were severely burned, they would no longer be suitable for goshawk habitat. Spotted frogs and their habitat exist downstream in lower Rail Canyon, which is well outside the proposed salvage area. The BLM would prohibit any salvage operations from April 1 to June 30 to avoid disturbing the frogs or their habitat. Additionally, the design features to improve RCA condition would also benefit spotted frog habitat. No harvest activities would occur within 0.25 miles of a fish bearing stream, nor would it impact fisheries habitat.

Timber Harvesting and Heavy Equipment Operation – Best Management Practices (BMP's), which were approved in the SEORMP and listed in Appendix O, would be implemented for all logging and heavy equipment operations including road construction and maintenance.

Logging Plan – The Purchaser would fall timber by hand or with ground-based harvesting equipment such as a feller-buncher or a whole tree harvester. Logs would be removed by ground-based skidding. The BMP's recommend, but do not restrict skidding to slopes that are less than 30% gradient and this would be the case for most of the skidding. In some units skidding would occur on slopes up to 50% by establishing short skid trails, contoured to the slope, with a maximum trail gradient of 30%. In all areas where this can't be accomplished, the Purchaser would end-line logs from steeper slopes to flatter ground and then skid them to the landings.

Silvicultural Prescription – If logging is completed prior to the onset of summer 2008, the Purchaser would harvest all standing ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees greater than 10" dbh that have not been reserved. As

previously stated, reserved trees would include any tree with any amount of green foliage with the exception of the small patch to be thinned that was described at the beginning of this document. Additionally, a minimum amount of snags would be reserved as described in the next paragraph. If logging were to continue into summer 2008, these diameter limits would need to be raised to account for blue stain in pine and checking in Douglas-fir which affects the smallest trees first and significantly devalues the wood. Snag, down log and green tree retention would be addressed as indicated below. Where deemed appropriate by BLM resource specialists, harvested areas would be artificially regenerated in the spring of 2009. Areas that still have an adequate seed source would be allowed to regenerate naturally.

Snag, Down Log and Green Tree Retention – As stated in the SEORMP, Appendix F, the BLM would designate four fire killed trees per acre greater than 20” dbh for retention as snags. If fire killed trees of this size are not available, substitution would occur with the largest trees available. All soft snags would be reserved, and if available, at least two of the four snags per acre would be soft snags. Species would likely vary between ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. Additionally, there are quite a few reserved trees that are scorched and it is not clear which of these trees will die, but it is clear that more trees will die and become snags within the next several years. Those that die in the next several years would contribute to the total number of snags in the near term and the trees that survive represent the future recruitment of snags in this area or “green tree retention” (GTR).

The SEORMP direction in Appendix F for down woody debris (DWD) is to retain 10 logs per acre. While the RMP direction is not size specific, these logs are typically a minimum of 12” at the small end and 20’ in length where available. Existing down logs that meet this criterion would be retained on site, as would cull logs that are felled during harvest activities. Future down logs will also continue to be recruited as unmerchantable, fire-killed trees fall of their own accord, which in the near term will satisfy the RMP direction.

Soil Compaction - Soil compaction would be restricted to less than 12% of the proposed area, excluding roads. Where traditional ground-based skidding is used, this would be achieved by requiring the contractor to use previously existing skid trails where available. Where old skid trails don’t exist, new skid trails would be designated and spaced a minimum of 125 feet apart. Seasonal restrictions would permit operations only during dry or frozen soil conditions. Leading-end suspension of logs would be required during skidding. Where end-lining is necessary to yard logs to designated skid trails, no suspension is required until the log is brought to the skidder and then leading-end suspension would be required while the log is skidded to the landing. Where necessary, skid trails and/or yarding corridors would be water-barred and/or seeded following operations. Generally, this would apply to skid trails with a slope greater than 10%, but may include slopes of a lesser gradient if deemed appropriate by the BLM’s Authorized Officer.

Mechanized harvesting equipment differs in design and manner of operation from traditional ground-based equipment and thus would have different soil compaction restrictions. While the 12% compaction rule would still apply, these machines are not restricted to designated trails. These machines have a lower ground pressure, which would not be allowed to exceed 6 p.s.i. and they generally make only one pass over a given piece of ground. When used in conjunction with the seasonal restriction of operating only on dry or frozen soil, there would be only negligible soil compaction from use of these machines.

All landings would be approved by the BLM’s Authorized Officer prior to use. The Contractor would select landing sites that are of the minimum size commensurate with safety and equipment requirements. Landings would be located on firm ground, not on steep side hills and would not require excavation. Every effort would be made to locate landings on previously disturbed sites such as roads, road shoulders and borrow pits.

Visual Resource – The proposed action area is within a non-sensitive view-shed categorized by BLM as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class IV. As stated in the SEORMP, Appendix J, “The objective of Class IV is to provide for management activities that require major modification of the landscape.” However, in all forestry activities undertaken by the BLM-Vale District, every effort is made to ensure that the visual impacts will be as unobtrusive as possible.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance:

Land Use Plan Name: Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision

Date Approved/Amended: September, 2002

The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable LUP because it is specifically provided for in the following LUP decision(s): **Proposed Southeastern Oregon Resource Management Plan and Final EIS, Forest and Woodlands page 434.**

C. Compliance with NEPA:

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with **516 DM 11.9, C. Forestry, (8) – Salvaging dead or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 0.5 mile of temporary road construction.**

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 apply.

Reviewer: Eric Mayes Date: 1-20-08

D. Categorical Exclusions - Extraordinary Circumstances Documentation:

| THE PROPOSED CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION ACTION WILL: | YES | NO |
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| 2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety. | | X |
| Rationale: The proposed salvage logging area is in a remote location, distant from any population center. The roads used to access the area from U.S. Hwy. 26 would have signs erected warning the public of log truck traffic. | | |
| 2.2 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. | | X |
| Rationale: An interdisciplinary team of BLM specialists evaluated the proposed salvage logging and determined that there is no threat of significant impact to the above named resources. | | |
| 2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2) (E)]. | | X |
| Rationale: There is no known controversy regarding the environmental effects or alternative uses of resources for this proposed salvage logging. | | |
| 2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. | | X |
| Rationale: The proposed salvage logging has been evaluated by an interdisciplinary team of BLM specialists and they have determined that there is no threat of significant environmental effects. | | |
| 2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects. | | X |
| Rationale: This action would not establish a precedent as any future salvage proposal would be evaluated based on its own potential merits and/or impacts, just as this proposal has been. | | |
| 2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects. | | X |
| Rationale: The cumulative effect of the design features contained in this proposed action and the rehabilitation measures proposed under a separate ecologic site restoration plan should have a positive effect toward watershed stabilization and restoration. The two drainages addressed in this CX were in poor riparian, forest health and fuels condition prior to the fire and the fire only exacerbated these conditions. The proposed actions in this CX are designed to reduce fuels, reestablish forest cover and begin attainment of riparian management objectives. | | |
| 2.7 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. | | X |
| Rationale: A cultural resources inventory has been completed and a "No Effect Determination" has been made. | | |

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| 2.8 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 | X |
| Rationale: The proposed salvage logging operation has been evaluated by an interdisciplinary team of BLM specialists and they have determined that there is no threat of significant environmental effects. | |
| 2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. | X |
| Rationale: Tree planting, which would occur subsequent to salvage logging, would bring this site into compliance with the Oregon Forest Practices Act. | |
| 2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898). | X |
| Rationale: The logging and milling of the wood from this site, as well as the subsequent tree planting and other restorative activities would provide job opportunities. These opportunities are available to all qualified people, regardless of their economic or ethnic status. In fact, for a number of years there has been a trend for minority people, who are often of low income status, to comprise the greatest percentage of woods workers. | |
| 2.11 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). | X |
| Rationale: A cultural resources inventory has been completed and a "No Effect Determination" has been made. | |
| 2.12 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). | X |
| Rationale: The proposed salvage logging area has been surveyed for noxious weeds and areas of weed infestation have been found. Prior to implementation, activities would be coordinated with the resource area weed specialist to identify site specific actions (i.e. vehicle washing, areas to avoid vehicle parking etc.) necessary to avoid spread of noxious weeds. Treated areas would be monitored for noxious weed establishment. | |

E. Special Consideration:

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 this Categorical Exclusion Documentation will further protect these resources from the potential for significant impacts resulting from implementation of the Proposed Action.

F. Signature:

Authorizing Official: Pat Ryan Date: 1/23/08

Name: Pat Ryan Title: Malheur R.A. Field Manager

G. Contact Person:

For additional information concerning this CX review, contact: Marc Pierce, Vale District Forester, Baker Field Office, 3285 11th Street, P.O. Box 947, Baker City, OR 97814, telephone (541) 523-1339.

H. Administrative Remedy:

The forest management decision to be made on the action described in this categorical exclusion is subject to protest under 43 CFR subpart 5003. Under 43 CFR 5003.2 subsection (b), the decision will be published in local newspaper(s) as a notice of sale and this notice shall constitute the decision document. Under 43 CFR 5003.3 subsection (a), protests may be filed with the authorized officer within 15 days of the publication date of the notice of timber sale advertisement. Under 43 CFR 5003.3 (b), protest(s) filed with the authorized officer shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision. A decision on this protest would be subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, although, under 43 CFR 5003.1 subsection (a), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of a decision governing or relating to forest management under 43 CFR 5003.2 or 5003.3.