

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EUGENE DISTRICT OFFICE
Finding of No Significant Impact
For the 2010 Thinning Project
Environmental Assessment
No. DOI-BLM-OR-E060-2009-0007-EA**

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Land Management prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-OR-E060-2009-0007-EA) which analyzed the effects of a commercial thinning and density management project within approximately 1000 acres of Matrix and 500 acres of Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations (LUA) in the Upper Coast Fork of the Willamette River and Row River 5th field watersheds. The locations are as follows:

- Fawn Peak (T.23S., R.03W., Sec. 13)
- Little Creek (T.23S.,R.03W., Sec. 23)
- Stennett Butte (T.23S., R.03W., Sec. 15)
- Raisor (T.22S., R.04W., Sec. 13)
- Cedar Creek (T.,22S.,R.04.,Sec. 1)
- Wilson Creek (T.22S., R.03W., Sec. 9)
- Perkins Creek (T.21S., R.02W., Sec. 27)

The EA considered three alternatives: 1) no action, 2) an action alternative with only ground-based and cable logging systems and 3) an action alternative with helicopter logging in addition to cable and ground-based systems.

All of the proposed harvest areas, with the exception of Perkins Creek, are within designated northern spotted owl Critical Habitat. The Land Use Allocations for these acres are Matrix and Riparian Reserve. Project actions may include timber harvest, instream habitat restoration, road construction, road improvements and road decommissioning.

Perkins Creek is part of a cooperative Density Management Study between the BLM, U.S. Geological Survey Biological Resources Division, Oregon State University, and the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA (OR090-EA-2009-07), and all other information available to me, it is my determination that the implementation of the proposed action is consistent with the objectives, land use allocations and management direction of the 1995 ROD/RMP. This proposed action is in conformance with the Eugene District's 2008 Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (2008 ROD/RMP). The analysis supporting this decision tiers to the 2008 Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revision of the Resource Management Plan of the Western Oregon Bureau of Land Management (2008 Final EIS).

Revision of a resource management plan necessarily involves a transition from the application of the old resource management plan to the application of the new resource management plan. A transition from the old resource management plan to the new resource management plan avoids disruption of the management of BLM-administered lands and allows the BLM to utilize work already begun on the planning and analysis of projects.

The 2008 ROD allowed for such projects to be implemented consistent with the management direction of either the 1995 resource management plan, as amended (1995 RMP), or the 2008 RMP, at the discretion of the decisionmaker.

This project is in compliance with the 1995 RMP, and meets the requirements designated in the 2008 ROD for such

transition projects:

1. A decision was not signed prior to the effective date of the 2008 ROD.
2. Preparation of National Environmental Policy Act documentation began prior to the effective date of the 2008 ROD; the project was described in the district planning newsletter "The Eye to the Future" in October 2008.
3. A decision on the project will be signed within two years of the effective date of the 2008 ROD.
4. There would be no destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat designated for species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The implementation of this project will not have significant environmental effects beyond those already identified in the 2008 Final EIS/Proposed RMP. The proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effects on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA.

Context

The action alternatives would occur in the Matrix and Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations as designated by the 1995 Eugene District Resource Management Plan. The RMP anticipated that forest management activities would occur in the Matrix and Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations. The action alternatives are in compliance with the 1995 Eugene District RMP. The project is also in conformance with the 2008 ROD/RMP.

Under the action alternatives, treatments would be designed to retain or enhance the Primary Constituent Elements necessary to support spotted owls. Primary Constituent Elements are the physical and biological features that support nesting, roosting, foraging and dispersal, and are determined to be essential for the conservation of the spotted owl. These elements, as they relate to this project, include stand characteristics such as moderate to high canopy closure, multi-storied and multi-species canopies, large trees with a high degree of deformities (e.g., cavities, broken tops), and large snags and down logs.

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the 2010 Thinning Project relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. ***Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*** The EA considered both potential beneficial and adverse effects especially for relevant resources such wildlife. None of the effects are beyond the range of effects analyzed in the 2008 Final EIS.
2. ***The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.*** No aspect of the action alternatives would have an effect on public health and safety.
3. ***Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*** There are no parks, prime farmlands, wilderness or wild and scenic rivers in the project area. The proposed project is not expected to affect cultural resources, but if cultural resources are found in pre-project surveys, they would be assessed for significance. If necessary, the project would be redesigned to protect the values present.
4. ***The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*** The effects of actions planned under the proposed action are similar to many other forest management projects implemented within the scope of the 1995 Eugene RMP and the 2008 RMP. No unique or appreciable scientific controversy has been identified regarding the effects of the proposed action.
5. ***The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*** The analysis has not shown that there would be any unique or unknown risks to

the human environment not previously considered and analyzed in 2008 Final EIS, to which this decision is tiered. Thinning and density management treatments have been conducted for many years in the vegetation types typical of the project area.

6. ***The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*** This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. The proposed action is consistent with actions appropriate for the Matrix and Riparian Reserve land use allocations, as designated by the 1995 Eugene District ROD/RMP and for TMA lands designated under the 2008 RMP.
7. ***Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*** The environmental analysis did not reveal any cumulative effects beyond those already analyzed in the 2008 Final EIS.
8. ***The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*** There are no features within the planning area that are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or are significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.
9. ***The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.***
The proposed units, except for Perkins Creek, are within the Willamette/North Umpqua Critical Habitat Unit (CHU 13). Programmatic consultation has been completed for the project area. Habitat modification from light/moderate thinning in the majority of the project area would be not likely to adversely affect northern spotted owls because habitat function would be maintained and sufficient untreated dispersal habitat would be available in the project area. However, the Service concluded that the proposed thinning at Fawn Peak would be likely to adversely affect spotted owls and Critical Habitat due to proximity to the predicted owl site 1NEWITS. The BLM has conducted further habitat evaluation and spotted owl surveys since the Biological Opinion was issued. Habitat conditions show small tree size, high tree density, uniform age distribution, and low amounts of useful large CWD and snags. The habitat also lacks nesting structure, well-developed understory and shrub layers, sub-canopy flying space, and a variety of roosting choices for thermoregulation. The project area is spotted owl dispersal habitat due to these conditions and would provide only limited foraging opportunities. Surveys in 2009 did not detect spotted owls at or near the 1NEWITS site. Additionally, the acres proposed for treatment that would affect the provincial home range of the site was reduced from the 765 reported in the Biological Opinion to approximately 200 acres. Regardless, the Service concluded that the proposed action would not jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl, nor would it destroy or adversely modify spotted owl Critical Habitat.

In keeping with the relevant biological assessment, project actions are designed to maintain and improve habitat functions at both the stand and landscape scale. The action alternatives would accelerate the development of habitat features used by northern spotted owls such as large trees and snags, multiple canopy layers, herbaceous and shrub vegetation, and large coarse wood debris.. Spotted owls would be expected to continue to utilize treated areas because post-project canopy cover would be maintained at 40% or greater, a figure used as a threshold for dispersal function.

The proposed action would have no effect on any listed fish species (EA, p. 35).

None of the effects to listed species would be beyond the range of effects analyzed in the 2008 Final EIS.

10. ***Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*** The proposed action does not threaten to violate any law. The proposed action is in compliance with the 1995 Eugene RMP and the 2008 RMP, which provide direction for the protection of the environment on public lands.