



United States Department of the Interior



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February 28, 2013

IN REPLY REFER TO:
1790/5400 (ORL040)

DECISION RECORD FOR BUCK MOUNTAIN ROAD EA DOI-BLM-OR-L014-2012-002-EA

INTRODUCTION

The Buck Mountain Road Environmental Assessment (EA) #DOI-BLM-OR-L014-2012-002-EA analyzed the effects of constructing approximately one quarter (0.25) mile of permanent road in order to access approximately 50 acres of plantation thinning. This road segment would be an extension of an existing road that is closed year-round with a barricade. Post-harvest, this road will remain closed year-round, except for administrative purposes.

The Klamath Falls Resource Area (KFRA) interdisciplinary team analyzed the actions proposed in the Buck Mountain Road EA based on: (a) current resource conditions in the project area, (b) the results of monitoring previous activities within and surrounding the project area, (c) meeting the purpose and need as identified in the Buck Mountain Road EA, (d) implementation of the management action and direction stipulated in the 1995 Klamath Falls Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP), and (e) comments from the public. The proposal presented and evaluated in the Buck Mountain Road EA reflects what the KFRA interdisciplinary team determined to be the best balance and integration of resource conditions, resource potential, competing management objectives, expressed interests and concerns of the public.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the proposed action. As part of this action, applicable best management practices (BMPs) in Appendix D of the KFRA Record of Decision (ROD)/RMP and the project design features (PDFs) in Appendix B of the Buck Mountain Road EA will be applied. This decision will result in the implementation of the action described in the EA and outlined below. See Map 1 for further information.

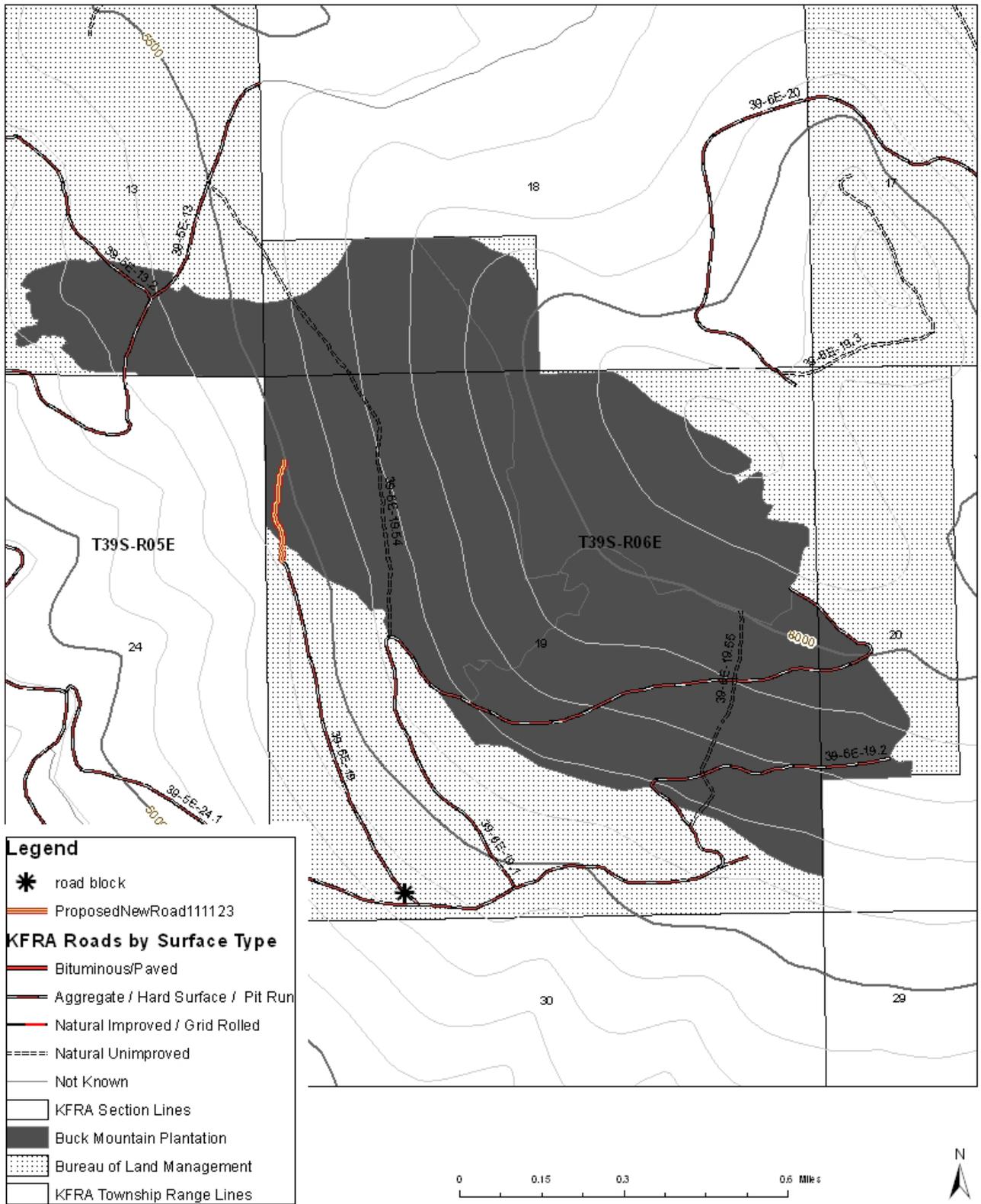
Specifically, this decision will result in:

Extending road 39-6E-19 by approximately one quarter of a mile (1,320 feet) in order to provide access to 50 acres of plantation for harvest.

Mitigation

No additional mitigation was deemed necessary and thus none was described in the EA or in this Decision Record.

Map 1. Proposed Road Construction



CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Endangered Species Act (ESA) Consultation

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (as amended 1973) was completed for the Cold Onion Forest Health Treatments EA (EA # OR-014-08-01) including the approximately 560 acres of plantation treatments. The BLM made a “Likely to Adversely Affect” determination for the northern spotted owl (NSO) due to the downgrading of suitable habitat to dispersal habitat within two spotted owl territories as a result of the proposed timber sales under this EA. The FWS concurred with this determination and issued a Biological Opinion (8-10-09-08F0009) on August 12, 2009. The Service has determined that the proposed actions under the Cold Onion Forest Health Treatments EA will not jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl. A “No Effect” determination was made for all other listed species and designated critical habitat.

The Buck Mountain plantation thinning treatments described in the Cold Onion Forest Health Treatments EA and the proposed road construction analyzed in the Buck Mountain Road EA are not within any known spotted owl territories. The proposed road construction would occur primarily within a 30-year-old pine plantation classified as non-habitat for the spotted owl with only the initial 200 feet of the road construction in dispersal habitat. The proposed road construction and plantation thinning would not change that classification or the determinations made by the BLM for the actions consulted on under the Cold Onion EA. On January 3, 2013 the final rule for NSO designated critical habitat became effective. The proposed road construction is outside of the NSO critical habitat designation.

The BLM notified the FWS about the proposed road construction necessary to complete the plantation thinning. On May 21, 2012, the FWS determined that the proposed road would not trigger re-initiation and the Cold Onion Forests Health Biological Opinion (8-10-09-08F0009) would meet our section 7 consultation requirements for the Buck Mountain Road EA.

Cultural Resources Consultation

Perry Chocktoot, Director of Culture and Heritage for The Klamath Tribes, was consulted on this project at the KFRA bi-annual tribal consultation meeting on December 14, 2007.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public scoping input and comments were considered in development and refinement of the proposed action and alternatives, and in this decision.

Initial Scoping

The KFRA requested public input on the Buck Mountain Road EA in a letter mailed to “All Interested Parties” on February 17, 2012. This scoping letter outlined the proposed treatment for the analysis area and was mailed to approximately 110 persons and groups on KFRA’s NEPA mailing list. No responses were received.

EA Comments

Upon completion of the EA, parties that have expressed interest in this type of action were notified on June 28, 2012 and given an opportunity to comment on the EA during a formal thirty

(30) day public comment period. One written comment (email) was received from Oregon Wild. The following are responses to paraphrased comments we received during the EA comment period.

Comment: The ecological gains of thinning a young plantation should be weighed against the impacts of road construction.

Response: The Cold Onion Forest Health Treatments EA (EA # OR-014-08-01) analyzed the effects of thinning the Buck Mountain plantation stands. A decision was made on July 17, 2010 to thin up to 560 acres of plantation, including the approximately 50-acre area accessed by this proposed road extension. Under that decision, the 50 acres could be thinned whether or not the road extension analyzed in this EA is constructed. If the road is not constructed, the thinned trees could be hand-piled and burned with additional impacts to the residual plantation from pile burning. If the road is constructed, the thinned material would be utilized. However, based on field review of the approximately 50 acres of plantation, it was determined that hand-thinning the plantation to the desired density would generate large amounts of slash, and pile burning would cause excessive mortality to the residual stand. Thinning and leaving the material on site would result in a high fire hazard. The proposed road construction is necessary to allow for removal and utilization of the thinned plantation material. The construction is permanent because the road is necessary for future management actions.

Comment: There is ecological value in leaving some areas unthinned. Unthinned areas provide important values such as natural levels of dead wood.

Response: We agree that there is value in leaving some areas unthinned. However, the discussions of whether or not to thin these stands were included in the Cold Onion Forest Health Treatments EA. A decision was made on July 17, 2010 to thin up to 560 acres of plantation, including the approximately 50-acre area accessed by this proposed road extension. The Buck Mountain Road EA covers only the proposed action of constructing a quarter mile of road extension.

Comment: There are already too many roads on the landscape.

Response: Previous actions in the immediate sale area have resulted in reduction of existing and open roads. The Cold Onion Forest Health EA, which analyzed thinning of the pine plantations, included the closure of approximately 19 miles of open roads and obliteration of 7 miles of open roads. The additional one quarter mile of road construction is an extension of an existing road that is closed year-round with a barricade. Post-harvest, this road will remain closed year-round, except for administrative purposes.

Comment: Road construction has significant adverse effects on soil, water, wildlife, weeds, fire risk and carbon storage.

Response: The BLM recognizes the impacts associated with existing roads and road construction and has addressed them in the EA.

Comments: This EA does not consider all connected actions and is a case of segmentation.

Response: The Buck Mountain Road EA was written in order to resolve an unforeseen need for an extension to an existing road in order to complete the thinning of approximately 50 acres of plantation. This is not a case of segmentation. The project was not divided into segments or temporal phases to avoid acknowledgment of significant environmental impacts. It is a case of an overlooked logistical need to extend a road in order to complete the plantation thinning that was analyzed in the Cold Onion EA. Since no road construction was analyzed under the Cold Onion EA, the Buck Mountain Road EA considered all additional impacts of the road extension and any connected actions that would occur from the proposed quarter mile road extension.

Comment: Is there some way to thin this stand without building a road through mature forest.

Response: Approximately 200 ft. of the road construction would occur in a mixed-age forest stand comprised primarily of 20-year-old ponderosa pine with a poorly stocked overstory of mature mixed conifer trees. The remainder of the road construction will occur in a pine plantation that is approximately 30 years old, with trees averaging 8 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH).

In addition, the interdisciplinary team considered an option to manually cut and burn trees within the plantation to achieve the purpose and need. It was determined that in thinning the plantation to the desired density, large amounts of slash would be generated, and burning it would cause excessive mortality to the residual stand. This would be the only other way to thin the stand without building a road, as thinning and leaving the material on site would result in a higher fire hazard.

BLM Actions Pertaining to Comments Received

There were no comments received following the initial scoping notification. None of the later EA comments presented cause for the interdisciplinary team to revise the Environmental Assessment. However, the comments were considered in this Decision.

DECISION RATIONALE

The decision to implement the construction of one-quarter mile of permanent road meets the Purpose and Need identified in the EA, and furthers the intent established in the Klamath Falls Resource Area RMP to harvest timber and protect other resource values as described in the EA and other sections of this Decision Record.

Alternatives Considered

The No Action Alternative is rejected because it does not meet the resource management objectives for the Matrix lands identified in the 1995 Klamath Falls Resource Area RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan. It would not allow economically feasible and permanent ground-based logging access for the area west of existing road 39-6E-19.54 (located east of the proposed road extension, see Map 1) in the northwestern corner of section 19, T. 39 S., R. 6 E., W.M.

One other alternative considered but dropped from detailed analysis was to build a temporary road rather than a permanent one. This alternative was rejected because it would not meet the Purpose and Need since constructing a temporary road multiple times to provide future access to the same area was not practical (see Buck Mountain Road EA, pg. 3).

Surveys

- Surveys for special status species were completed under the Cold Onion EA. No additional surveys were warranted for the proposed road extension under this EA.
- Required cultural surveys will be completed once mechanical pretreatment of vegetation within the road prism is completed and better ground access is available.

Consideration of Public Comments

I have reviewed the public comments summarized above and have discussed them with the interdisciplinary team of specialists on my staff. The Buck Mountain Road EA and this Decision Record contain the requisite site-specific information to implement the proposed action. The comments received do not provide any substantially new information or new analysis. Nor do they identify substantial new data gaps that would indicate additional analysis is needed. Finally, the comments do not identify any significant new data which would alter the effects described in the EA. I am confident that the Buck Mountain Road EA, plus the responses to public comments contained in this Decision Record, the Cold Onion EA, and the analysis done in the Klamath Falls Resource Area RMP/EIS to which the Buck Mountain Road EA is tiered, represents a thorough analysis of potential effects associated with this proposed action.

Finding of No Significant Impact

No significant impacts were identified. No impacts beyond those anticipated in the KFRA RMP/EIS would occur. Refer to the accompanying Finding of No Significant Impact.

