



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

for the

SOUTH FORK LITTLE BUTTE FOREST MANAGEMENT PROJECT

(DOI-BLM-OR-M060-2015-0001-EA)

Introduction

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management, Ashland Resource Area (BLM) analyzed for forest management activities, including commercial timber harvest and associated activity fuels treatments (1,676 acres) and non-commercial treatments (1,553 acres), on BLM-administered Matrix lands in the *Environmental Assessment for the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project (SFLBFM Project)*. Transportation management activities, including road maintenance and use (approximately 122.3 miles), temporary road construction (3.04 miles), permanent road construction (0.80 miles), full road decommissioning (4.05 miles), long-term road closure (7.27 miles) were also analyzed. Proposed activities are located in portions of two 6th-field sub-watersheds (Lower and Middle South Fork Little Butte Creeks) of the Little Butte Creek 5th-field watershed. The total size of the Planning Area is 35,383 acres. The BLM manages 18,035 acres (51%) within the Planning Area, and treatments are proposed on 13.8% of those lands.

Based on the context and intensity of the effects analyzed in the SFLBFM Project Environmental Assessment (EA), (pp. 3-1 through 3-157), I have determined Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative with the incorporated Project Design Features, is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions within the analysis area and would not exceed the effects described in the Medford District Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDI 1995).

The SFLBFM Project EA documented the site-specific analysis of effects to the environment and tiered to and incorporated by reference as appropriate broader scale analyses documenting the environmental and human effects of a forest management program included in the Medford District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (USDI 1994); the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (USDA/USDI 1994); and the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (USDA/USDI 2000).

Alternative 2 would include implementation of the Project Design Features (PDFs) described in the EA (p. 2-30 through 2-44), and applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Appendix D of the 1995

Medford District ROD/RMP. By implementing these protective measures, the BLM would avoid or reduce adverse effects from management activities.

In the following discussion, I considered the following criteria, as required in 40 CFR § 1508.27 by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) for evaluating the significance of the effects of the activities proposed in the SFLBFM Project.

1. Not result in significant beneficial or adverse effects.

The EA documented the site-specific analysis of effects to the environment. The required application of the PDFs, an integral part of the SFLBFM Project, will ensure the potential for adverse effects on resources is avoided or minimized to the extent possible.

Based on the analysis documented in the EA, no significant adverse or beneficial effects will result from implementing Alternative 2 in the SFLBFM Project EA.

Vegetative Resources

Actions under Alternative 2 are expected to have measurable, although insignificant, beneficial effects on vegetation conditions in the analysis area by reducing stand densities and increasing tree growth and vigor; increasing forest stand resilience to wildfire, drought, and insects and disease (EA, p. 3-19, 3-20, 3-21, 3-32); creating diversified stand structure (height, age, and size) and spatial heterogeneity; and promoting diversity of fire resilient species including pines, oaks, and cedar (EA p. 2-26 to 2-29). The area to be treated under Alternative 2 represents about 14 percent of the analysis area (BLM lands within the Lower and Middle South Fork Little Butte Creek sub-watersheds) and about 16 percent of forested lands within the analysis area.

Permanent road construction would remove an estimated 3.2 acres of land from vegetative production over the long-term (EA p. 3-44); however, about 16 acres of lands would be restored to vegetative production over time as a result of decommissioning about 4.05 miles of existing roads (EA, p. 3-50). Overall, there will be a beneficial but insignificant effect from restoring about 13 acres (0.08% of forest lands within the analysis area) to vegetation production.

Fire and Fuels

There is no potential for significant adverse or beneficial effects to fire hazard and risk from the proposed South Fork Little Project. While fuel levels would increase immediately following forest management activities (EA p. 3-91), this increase in fuel loading would not create a significant increase in the risk of large-scale wildfires for the short-term, this is because:

- Flame lengths in a slash model would be about 4 feet, which would still allow for direct attack (EA, p. 3-31).
- Slash piling is required soon after yarding is completed (within 4-6 weeks and often sooner) on a unit by unit basis, which breaks up the continuity of the fuel bed and its ability to carry fire;
- Slash is green when first cut and gradually becomes more susceptible to burning; green fuels can dampen fire behavior and handpiles usually need to cure for 4-6 months before they will burn (EA, p. 2-30);
- Pile burning to complete the post-harvest fuels treatment would be completed within 6 months to one year following completion of harvest activities (EA p. 2-30).
- Following treatment of activity fuels, fire hazard would be lower than pre-harvest conditions due to the reduction in ladder and canopy fuels (EA p. 3-31) for acreage treated.

- There would be no increase in open road density over the long-term (which can be a source of human caused ignitions), and roads proposed for decommissioning and long-term closure were reviewed first by BLM fire/fuels specialists to ensure they did not provide critical access for fire management.
- The 133 acres of regeneration harvest and group select patches within 109 acres would be less fire prone and more fire-resilient in the short-term (about 10 years) because prescriptions call for leaving the larger healthier trees and treating post-harvest slash (surface fuels). Over the long-term (10-20 years), these stands would begin to increase in flammability and decrease in fire resiliency as young trees begin to establish and grow beneath the overstory and in group select openings (EA, p. 3-32). However, these acres represent <1% of the fire analysis area. Overall, fire resiliency of the Analysis Area is improved due to the overall reduction in fire hazard within treatment units especially when combined with previous fuels reduction treatments, about 1,395 acres (EA p. 3-26), that have occurred on BLM-administered lands within the Analysis Area.

Soil Resources

No significant impacts to soil resources have been identified. BLM's soil scientist worked closely with BLM's road engineer and timber planner to avoid locating roads, both permanent (0.8 mile) and temporary (3.04 miles), on fragile soils to the extent possible. Roads were located along upland ridges, flat ridge tops, on gentle slopes (except for one short (400 feet) steeper pitch on road 37S-2E-5), and to avoid areas of instability (EA, pp. 3-44 to 3-49, 3-72). With implementation of required project design features including dry weather construction and use, waterbarring, seeding and mulching, closing new permanent roads, and decommissioning/decompacting all temporary roads following completion of operation, the long-term effects to soils from road construction would not be significant.

Lands in Timber Productivity Capability Classification (TPCC) withdrawn areas for soil reasons were not included in the proposed action. Proposed project units were reviewed to determine stability, especially in soils classified as fragile (EA, p. 3-39). Project Design Features requiring ground based equipment to operate from designated skid trails, using existing skid trails when possible, and not operating mechanized harvesters off of designated skid trails unless soils are dry (15 percent soil moistures or less) would result in compaction within project harvest units below 12% and 5% productivity loss as analyzed in the 1994 Medford District FEIS RMP. Soil disturbance from all harvest activities would not result in a significant amount of soil leaving the site, and erosion rates would return to near-normal within approximately five years (EA, p. 3-56).

Road decommissioning would have beneficial but insignificant effects on soil resources by placing about 16 acres back into vegetative production (EA p. 3-50); this would be reduced by about 3 acres where permanent road construction would remove slightly over 3 acres from vegetative production (EA, p. 3-44). The net increase of acres in vegetation production (about 13 acres) represents less than 1% of the soil productivity analysis area. Soil productivity would recover in 10 or more years as disturbed sites become re-vegetated (EA, p. 3-49).

Water Resources

The implementation of Alternative 2 would not have significant adverse or beneficial impacts to water quality or hydrologic flow. While there is potential for sedimentation to streams from activities associated with timber harvest (road and landing construction, harvesting, and timber haul) and road decommissioning (including culvert removal), the design of the project and the implementation of required Project Design Features (Best Management Practices) are expected to substantially reduce the potential for sediment to enter streams. With the exception of one tractor landing in the outer portion of a Riparian Reserve, located on flat ground and disconnected from the stream network, no harvest and

yarding operations occur in Riparian Reserves. Therefore, fine sediment mobilized from units or skid trails is anticipated to be filtered by vegetation in Riparian Reserves, and deposited on the forest floor before reaching streams (EA . 3-89). Road construction (permanent or temporary) would be along stable ridge tops or sub-ridge tops and would not occur in Riparian Reserves, which would reduce the likelihood of construction generated sediment reaching surface water. While there may be a short-term impulse of sediment and turbidity from culvert removals (associated with road decommissioning), the implementation of PDFs and BMPs would greatly reduce the magnitude of effects to minor, less than one cubic yard per culvert removal (EA, p. 92). These short-term increases, however, would result in long-term benefits of reducing chronic sediment inputs and road densities in a Tier 1 Key Watershed (EA, p. 3-72).

BLM is recognized by Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as the Designated Management Agency for implementing the Clean Water Act on BLM lands (EA p. 3-68). In 2008, the DEQ completed the Rogue Basin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), which was approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Approved BLM actions are those compliant with the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan, provided Best Management Practices and Project Design Features are followed to avoid exceedance of TMDLs (EA, p. 3-68). Best Management Practices and Project Design Features are required as part of implementation of the proposed action (EA, p. 2-30 and as described throughout the EA).

With no management in Riparian Reserves, stream temperatures would not be affected since no shade producing vegetation would be removed (EA, p. 3-71). Since the proposal does not appreciably decrease canopy cover within the transient snow zone or increase road densities (the criteria used to assess potential changes in peak flow), the project would not result in peak flow increases (EA, p. 3-73).

Based on analysis documented in the EA, the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project is compliant with the Rogue Basin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and North and South Forks Little Butte Creek Key Watershed Water Quality Restoration Plan (EA, p. 3-71). The South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project would have no significant adverse impacts on water quality, and is compliant with the Clean Water Act, and the 1995 Medford District RMP.

Aquatic Habitat and Fish

No significant impacts to aquatic habitat or fish would occur. Project Design Features (PDFs) are incorporated into this project which provide protection to aquatic resources. As described for Water Resources above, the South Fork Little Butte Project is designed to minimize the potential for sediment to streams and includes required Project Design Features (Best Management Practices), to ensure no adverse effects to water quality would occur. Furthermore, with the incorporation of Riparian Reserves, future recruitment of wood inputs to streams would be unaffected by the project.

The mechanical decommissioning of roads includes the removal of culverts and re-shaping banks that would lead to small site level inputs of fine sediment into the aquatic habitat. Previous road obliteration projects implemented by the BLM suggest that less than one cubic yard of sediment would be input at each crossing site. Road decommissioning would occur during the in-stream summer work period when stream flows are very low. For perennial streams, there would likely be a brief pulse of elevated turbidity when culverts are pulled. The displaced sediment would settle out just downstream of the work site until the first significant flow event of the fall/winter, when it would be flushed downstream and would quickly become undetectable beyond background conditions. The intermittent crossings would be dry when the culverts are pulled, any displaced sediment would remain in the channel until the first large storm event the following fall/winter when it would be flushed downstream (EA p. 92-93). These one-time contributions of sediment would not meaningfully impact fish or aquatic organisms at more than the

immediate site level scale. Over time road decommissioning would yield a benefit as a net reduction in hydrological connectivity between roads and the aquatic system, reduced chronic sediment into the aquatic habitat, and reduced road densities in a Tier 1 Key Watershed (EA, p. 3-93).

The potential for sediment inputs to streams from log haul were reduced by requiring seasonal operating restrictions according to the location and condition of road surfaces relative to their potential for delivering sediment to streams. Only dry weather haul would be allowed in the Lost Creek drainage (EA, p. 3-94); hauling on natural surfaced roads would only occur during the dry season; only those roads that are paved or adequately surfaced with rock may be used for hauling outside of the dry weather season and only if haul would not result in road damage or turbid runoff (EA p. 2-36). The majority of the haul route miles are disconnected via functioning road drainage devices (i.e., outsloped surfaces, rolling dips, inboard ditches relieved by cross drain culverts), and haul routes would be spread over a large spatial and temporal scale, minimizing the use on any one surface would receive in a given season of hauling (EA, p. 3-95).

Wildlife

This section discusses only those wildlife species identified to be potentially affected by the SFLBFM Project; no significant effects to these species were identified. The proposed treatments would not cause any species to trend towards further listing as either a Bureau Sensitive species, or a federally Threatened or Endangered species (EA, Wildlife Section, p. 3-101 to 3-131).

- Surveys for Great Gray Owls (Survey and Manage), were completed and known reproductive sites would be protected with ¼-mile no-treatment buffer and meadows associated with great gray owls would receive a 300-foot no treatment buffer.
- Required surveys were conducted and Survey and Manage and/or Special Status mollusk species sites would receive protection buffers to preserve microclimate environmental conditions (e.g., canopy, ground cover, woody debris, rocky substrate) and to provide for the persistence of the species at these sites.
- One bald eagle nest location is approximately 0.4 miles from the nearest proposed project activity site. Project Design Features would restrict activities if this nest is active during the same year as any potential disruptive activities. (EA, p. 3-125).
- This project is not expected to affect long-term population viability of any bat species in the Wildlife Analysis Area. Retention of snags, decadent wildlife trees, and avoidance of Riparian Reserves, 100-acre spotted owl cores (KSOACs), NSO Nest Patches, and other reserves, would continue to provide undisturbed habitat for sensitive bat species.
- To provide for a variety of wildlife needs, at least two snags per acre would be retained in mortality salvage units (20 percent of commercial harvest under Alternative 2); in all remaining units all existing snags would retained. In all units, snags posing safety hazards to forest workers and the public would be felled and left on site as coarse woody material. All existing downed coarse woody material would be retained on site (EA, p. 2-39 and 3-102).

- Some migratory bird individuals other than USFWS species of concern may be disturbed or displaced during project activities, however, undisturbed areas within and adjacent to the Wildlife Analysis Area would provide adequate amount of habitat for displaced individuals. Overall populations and species composition in the Wildlife Analysis Area and region would be unaffected due to the limited scale of habitat modification and/or reproduction loss (EA, p. 3-126).
- There are three known golden eagle nest sites or breeding territories within the Wildlife Analysis Area (EA, p. 3-126); however, known locations are not within a distance of any activities that would cause disturbance (>0.5 mile), and over 97 percent of older forested habitat types within the Wildlife Analysis Area would be retained and would continue to provide habitat for this species (EA, p. 3-126).
- Approximately 69 percent of the Wildlife Analysis Area would retain thermal cover post-harvest; therefore, thermal cover requirements for Big-Game Winter Range (20 percent thermal cover) would be met. Disturbance to big-game during their critical period November 15 to April 1 would be reduced by enforcing seasonal operating restrictions on roads and units within the Big-Game Winter Range area (EA p. 2-40).

Botany/Weeds

- There would be no significant adverse or beneficial effects to botanical species as the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project is outside the range of known Threatened and Endangered plant species including *Fritillaria gentneri*, none were found during surveys of the Project Area. Surveys were conducted for Bureau Sensitive Species and Survey and Manage (S&M) species, all known sites would be protected according to recommendations provided by BLM's botanist (EA, p. 3-142).
- In the short-term (1 to 5 years), timber harvest and the associated road work could result in a moderate probability of introducing or spreading noxious weeds and non-native introduced plants in the Analysis Area; however, the implementation of required project design features and continuing weed monitoring and treatments would reduce the risk of overall spread, would likely eliminate small infestations, and decrease the size of larger infestations (EA, p. 3-144).

Recreation/Visual Resources

- The Hyatt-Howard Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and Buck Prairie Nordic ski trails are located in the South Fork Little Butte Project Planning Area. Thirteen of the project units (about 10 percent of the project) are located in the on the periphery of the recreation sites and as such would not cause adverse effects to the users of these areas (EA, p. 3-148). Snow plowing would be prohibited on roads 38-3E-29.3 and 39-3E-19.0 from the intersection of 38-3E-33.6 and Dead Indian Memorial Highway to provide for Nordic trail use (EA, p. 2-42 and 3-147).
- The Proposed Action is consistent with visual resource management objectives as stated in the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plans (EA, pp. 3-149, 3-150).

Range Management

- There would be no significant effects to grazing allotments in the analysis area. Forest management activities are not anticipated to influence livestock distribution or use patterns in any considerable way because the number of acres treated and their distribution is relatively minor compared to acres available for grazing, and proposed road lengths are mostly short in duration,

or they are located in areas where livestock distribution patterns are already established (EA, p. 3-153).

2. Not result in significant impacts on public health or safety.

No aspects of the SFLBFM Project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) standards for workplace health and safety are administered by OSHA to provide for worker and public safety.

Dust created from vehicle traffic on gravel or natural-surfaced roads and logging operations would be localized and of short duration. Applying water or lignin, as appropriate, would limit dust creation.

Prescribed burning would comply with the guidelines established by the Oregon Smoke Management Plan (OSMP) and the Department of Environmental Quality Air Quality and Visibility Protection Plan. Prescribed burning throughout southwest Oregon is administered and coordinated under the authority of the State Forester. In situations where air quality of the entire State or part thereof is, or would likely become adversely affected by smoke, additional restrictions are applied to avoid cumulative effects of prescribed burning across multiple ownerships (EA, p. 3-156).

3. Have no significant adverse effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area.

No wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, prime farm lands, Wild and Scenic Rivers (or rivers suitable for Wild and Scenic designation), caves, parks, or refuge lands exist in the SFLBFM Project Area.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and Research Natural Area (RNA)

There are two areas located within the SFLBFM Planning Area that are designated under the Medford District RMP to be managed as Special Areas to protect the primary values for which they are recognized. The two areas are: 1) Hole-in-the-Rock Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and 2) Lost Lake Research Natural Area (RNA). There are no activities proposed within the ACEC or RNA boundaries. The project would not affect the values for which the ACEC or RNA were designated as the perimeter boundaries for each of these areas sufficiently buffers the features for which they were established, nor would the SFLBFM activities increase human access to the areas (EA, pp. 3-150, 3-151).

Wilderness

Prescribed burning is not expected to affect visibility within the Crater Lake National Park and neighboring wilderness smoke sensitive Class I areas (Kalmiopsis and Mountain Lakes Wilderness Areas) during the visibility protection period (July 1 to September 15). Prescribed burning is not routinely conducted during this period primarily due to the risk of an escape wildfire (EA, p. 3-155).

4. Not have highly controversial environmental effects.

“Highly controversial”, in the context of 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4), refers to substantial disagreement within the scientific community about the environmental effects of a proposed action. It does not refer to expressions of opposition or expressions of preference among alternatives or differences of opinion concerning how public lands should be managed.

The South Fork Little Butte Forest Management project is similar in nature to many other forest management projects that have been implemented within the scope of the Medford District Resource Management Plan across the Medford District. The anticipated effects of harvesting timber, post-harvest fuels reduction, and new road construction, documented in the EA, are well known and no highly controversial effects have been identified.

A complete disclosure of the predicted effects is contained in Chapter 3 of the EA. The effects of this project are similar to those of other forest management projects implemented within the scope of the RMP and Northwest Forest Plan. Public concerns and input have been considered throughout the analysis (see the Public Involvement sections of the EA and Response to Comments of the Decision Record). For this project, the BLM considered and reviewed numerous publications. While there is opposition regarding some of the forest management prescriptions proposed such as regeneration harvesting, disease management, and mortality salvage, opposition to the project is not the same as “controversial effects.” The Ninth Circuit has held that a project is “highly controversial” if there is a “substantial dispute [about] the size, nature, or effect of the major Federal action rather than the existence of opposition to a use.” Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Blackwood, 161 F.3d 1208, 1212 (9th Cir. 1998) (quoting Sierra Club v. U.S. Forest Service, 843 F.2d 1190, 1193 (9th Cir. 1988)).

For this project, I find that the best available science was fully considered and interpreted appropriately to design the alternatives and predict effects based on professional judgment. The effects of the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial from a scientific or technical standpoint. Neither the environmental analysis nor the public comments identified any evidence of a significant scientific controversy.

5. Not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects, or unique or unknown environmental risks.

The effects of Alternative 2 are not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience with similar forest management projects and has found the effects to be reasonably predictable. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Public concerns and input have been considered throughout the analysis (see Public Involvement section of the EA and Response to Public Comments in the Decision Record). The actions analyzed in Alternative 2 are routine in nature, which includes standard PDFs, BMPs and seasonal restrictions. These effects are well known and do not involve unique or unknown risk to the human environment.

6. Not establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

The decision to implement Alternative 2 of the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about future considerations. Alternative 2 would implement actions that meet management direction in the 1995 Medford District RMP. Any future action would have its own set of conditions and would be evaluated through a future NEPA process.

7. Not result in significant cumulative environmental effects.

Cumulative environmental effects are “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the proposed action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions” (See definition of “cumulative impact” in 40 CFR § 1508.7).

Analysis was performed at multiple scales, and included the consideration of past actions, as reflected in current conditions, current actions, and foreseeable future actions on both private and federal lands (EA, Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences). No significant cumulative impacts were identified (EA, Chapter 3).

8. *Have no significant effects on scientific, cultural, or historic resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.*

Alternative 2 would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would the project cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

In accordance with the Protocol for Managing Cultural Resources on Lands Administered by the BLM and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (specifically, section 106), as amended, a literature review and archaeological reconnaissance was conducted for the SFLBFM Project Area. The SFLBFM Project was reviewed for the potential for adverse impacts to cultural resources.

Any known cultural sites within the Area of Potential Effect (APE) have been flagged for avoidance and unit boundaries adjusted for protection of the resource. When coupled with the Project Design Features listed in Chapter 2, no direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts are expected for cultural resources within the SFLBFM Project.

9. *Have no adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed as Federally Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated critical habitat for these species.*

No significant adverse or beneficial significant effects would occur to species listed or proposed to be listed as federally Endangered or Threatened species or their critical habitats.

Northern Spotted Owl (NSO)

Units proposed for treatment within the SFLBFM Project would be within the Provincial Home Range of 14 historic northern spotted owl sites (EA p. 3-106), and within 2012 designated critical habitat (EA, p. 3-120). The overall objectives of the proposed actions are to restore ecological processes or long-term forest health to forested landscapes, which is consistent with the 2011 Revised Recovery Plan and the 2012 Final CHU designation (EA, p. 3-120). The 2011 U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl includes recovery actions (RA) to guide activities that would help to further the recovery of the northern spotted owl. BLM worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to incorporate Recovery Actions consistent with BLM laws, policies, and regulations. The ID Team applied concepts of RA-10 strategy and the northern spotted owl Relative Habitat Suitability Model to refine the project from its original configuration (EA, pp. 2-2, 2-3). The intent was to reduce the potential for effects to spotted owls by avoiding the downgrading or removal of habitat within high priority home ranges. Additionally, there was no treatment of nesting habitat (McKelvey 1 habitat rating) within the home ranges of high priority sites or critical habitat. Collectively the Wildlife Analysis Area would maintain habitat conditions that provide for distribution and persistence of the species (EA, p. 3-118).

Consultation with the USFWS has been completed for this project in the BLM's *Biological Assessment for the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project* (SFLB_2015 BA) on January 9, 2015. The Biological Opinion (FWS Reference Number 01EOFW00-2015-F-0090) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) transmitted on May 15, 2015 determined that the proposed activities "are not likely to jeopardize the spotted owl" and they "do not anticipate that the project will adversely modify critical habitat at the subunit or range wide scale" (USDI FWS 2015, p. 46-49) (EA, p. 3-116).

Gray Wolf

The January 9, 2015 South Fork Little Butte (SFLB) Biological Assessment (BA) addressed effects to wolves and made a No Effect determination for wolves because the proposed activities would not disturb key wolf areas such as den sites and rendezvous sites, would not change prey availability, and would not increase public access in the area known to be used for denning and rendezvous sites (USDI 2015a). The

BA also indicated the SFLBFM Project was within the known wolf activity area that Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) had identified for OR-7 (ODFW 2014) (EA, p. 3-123).

Shortly before the SFLB BA was submitted to USFWS, ODFW identified OR-7, his mate, and pups as the Rogue Pack. Then on January 13, 2015, ODFW identified additional wolf activity in the Keno area. The known wolf activity maps for the Rogue Pack and the new Keno wolf pair was updated on the ODFW website on January 13, 2015. The SFLBFM Project is no longer within the Rogue Pack (OR-7) Activity Area and is not within the new Keno Activity Area. This new information does not change the effects determination for the SFLBFM Project. Additionally, as indicated in the BA, if a den or rendezvous site is identified prior to or during project activities, Section 7 Consultation PDC for wolves would be followed (USDI 2015a, Appendix A). Seasonal restrictions would be put in place (March 1 to June 30) for project activities located within one mile of a den or rendezvous site. Because these sites are difficult to locate and can change from year to year, this will need to be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the life of this project through annual updates and communication with the USFWS and ODFW (EA, p. 3-124).

Pacific Fishers

The USFWS issued a proposal to list the West Coast Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of fisher (*Pekania pennanti*) as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in the Federal Register on October 7, 2014 (Federal Register, Vol 79, no. 194, 10/7/14 pgs. 604190-60443). The SFLBFM Project falls within the range of the West Coast DPS of fisher. A final ruling is expected from the USFWS by April 2016. Fisher remains a BLM Bureau Sensitive Species (EA, p. 3-122).

Implementation of the SFLBFM Project includes Project Design Features (EA, p. 2-39) that will minimize impacts to fishers. These include the retention of key structural elements such as mature and decadent trees (including mistletoe-infected trees), snags, CWD, and large hardwoods for denning. Additionally, treatments are expected to increase areas of structural complexity within stands that have remained homogeneous from previous treatments. While 5 percent of the 61,209-acre Wildlife Analysis Area is proposed for treatments (1,676 acres of commercial treatments and 1,553 acres of non-commercial treatments), areas such as Riparian Reserves, NSO RA 32 habitat, 100-acre KSOAC owl cores, NSO Nest Patches, and other designated reserves would continue to provide undisturbed habitat for fishers. Adjoining the Wildlife Analysis Area to the east is a large Late Successional Reserve (LSR) that is located on USFS-administered land, which would also continue to provide habitat for fishers (EA, p. 3-123).

Because of the retention of these habitat features in the Wildlife Analysis Area, effects to fishers from implementation of this project are expected to be minimal, and would not trend this species towards further listing (EA, p. 3-123).

Fish and Designated Habitat

BLM's fish biologist determined the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project, Alternative 2, is a "May Affect/Not Likely to Adversely Affect" SONCC Coho salmon, CCH, and EFH in the South Fork Little Butte Creek Analysis Area catchments. This determination was made upon anticipated affects to aquatic habitat that can indirectly affect fish, and are described in the EA and the Biological Assessment (BA) prepared for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for the SFLBFM Project. Informal consultation on this project was completed in March of 2015. Effects to aquatic habitat were determined to be of insufficient magnitude and of a nature to not meaningfully impact aquatic habitats in fish bearing channels (EA, p. 82).

Botanical Species and Habitat

The Project Area is outside the range of any federally-listed T&E plant species. Therefore, there would be no effect on these species as a result of implementing Alternative 2 of the SFLBFM Project (EA, p. 3-142).

10. Not violate a Federal, State, Local or Tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Alternative 2 will not violate federal, state, or local environmental protection laws. Project Design Features, an integral part of this project, ensure project activities are consistent with the 1995 ROD/RMP, as well as comply with legal requirements applicable to this project (EA, pp. 1-6 through 1-8).

Finding

I have determined that the South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of the CEQ's criteria for significance (40 CFR § 1508.27) with regard to the context and intensity of the effects described in the EA, and on my understanding of the project, review of the project analysis, and review of public comments. As previously noted the analysis of effects documented in the EA has been completed within the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales and within the context of the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan, the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, and associated Environmental Impact Statements. The anticipated effects are within the scope, type, and magnitude of effects anticipated and analyzed in those plans.



Jennifer Sanborn
Acting Field Manager, Ashland Resource Area
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

8/19/2015
Date