

**Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
Friese Camp Forest Management Project
EA #DOI-BLM-OR-M050-2011-0015-EA**

Introduction

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management, Butte Falls Resource Area (BLM) analyzed forest management activities, road work, fuels treatments, and water source restoration on 2,195 acres of matrix lands and 65 acres of riparian reserves in the *Friese Camp Forest Management Project Environmental Assessment* (EA). Proposed projects are located in the Big Butte Creek and South Fork Rogue River fifth field watersheds. Most activities proposed in this EA are included in the North Fork Big Butte Creek and Beaver Dam Creek sixth field watersheds; however, a few acres are located in the Lower South Fork Rogue, Upper South Fork Big Butte, and Lower South Fork Big Butte sixth field watersheds (EA, Table 1-1, p. 2). Streams in the Project Area drain into North Fork Big Butte Creek to the south and Beaver Dam Creek to the north.

The EA analyzed the potential effects of the following forest management activities: commercial thinning, small diameter thinning, density management, restoration thinning, regeneration harvest, and selection harvest. Cut trees would be removed using ground-based or skyline-cable yarding systems. Fuel loads resulting from harvest would be reduced by lopping and scattering, hand piling and burning, or biomass removal.

Road projects that would be completed to support the timber harvest activities include road renovation and temporary route construction and decommissioning. Additional road work is proposed to move sections of permanent roads located along a stream by decommissioning the existing road and constructing a new road outside the riparian area. The Friese Camp project also analyzed closing roads that are surplus to BLM needs at this time, but could be used in the future. Decommissioning roads no longer needed by the BLM or adjacent landowners would reduce road density. Roads could be closed or decommissioned by decompacting the subgrade, pulling culverts, constructing water bars, barricading, or installing a gate.

Based on the context and intensity of the effects analyzed in the EA (p. 24-94), I have determined Alternative 3, the Selected Alternative, with the associated project design features from the Friese Camp Forest Management Project, is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area.

The Friese Camp Forest Management Project will not have significant effects beyond those described in the broader analyses conducted and disclosed in the environmental impact statements (EISs) for the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Northwest Forest Plan, or the effects have been determined to be insignificant. Environmental effects do not meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR § 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

In making this finding, 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 Friese Camp Forest Management Project.

Context

The Friese Camp Forest Management Project EA analyzed site-specific actions on 2,260 acres, or 7% of the 33,391-acre project area. The BLM manages 13,556 acres (41%) within the project area and management activities will occur on 16% of those lands. BLM lands in the project area have the following land use allocations: matrix, riparian reserve, and late-successional reserve (known northern spotted owl activity centers). Activities analyzed in the Selected Alternative are located on matrix and riparian reserve lands. No activities will occur in late-successional reserves.

Under the Selected Alternative, restoration thinning will occur on 1,834 acres and small diameter thinning on 379 acres, which includes 65 acres of riparian thinning. Slash (branches, twigs, bark, wood debris) created from the timber harvest will be treated by lopping and scattering, hand piling and burning, or biomass removal. The Selected Alternative also contains up to 76.8 miles of road renovation, 2.6 miles of road decommissioning, 5.1 miles of road closure (gates or barricades), 1.1 miles of road realignment, 3.1 miles of temporary route construction and decommissioning, 2.1 miles of temporary route renovation and decommissioning, and 1.3 miles of temporary route reconstruction and decommissioning.

The Selected Alternative will include implementation of the project design features listed in the EA (p. 16-21) and applicable best management practices in Appendix D of the 1995 Medford District RMP. These project design features are a compilation of resource protection measures identified by the Interdisciplinary Team and Best Management Practices identified in the Medford District ROD/RMP. The BLM conducted a review and update of the Best Management Practices in 2011 to provide direction regarding road maintenance practices and road-related actions with the intention to minimize or prevent sediment delivery to waters of the United States in compliance with the Clean Water Act (IM-OR-2011-018). Those Best Management Practices were incorporated into the Medford District RMP to minimize or reduce the conveyance and delivery of sediment to the waters of the United States. By implementing these protective measures, the BLM will avoid or reduce adverse effects from management activities.

The Friese Camp Forest Management project is consistent with the 1995 Medford District ROD/RMP and the effects anticipated from implementation of that plan.

Intensity

I have considered the intensity of the effects anticipated from the Friese Camp Forest Management Project relative to the severity of the effects, as described in the 10 considerations for evaluating intensity in the CEQ regulations [40 CFR § 1508.27(b)].

Chapter 3 of the EA (p. 24-94) details the effects of the project. None of the effects identified, including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, are considered to be significant and all anticipated effects are of the type and within the magnitude of effects analyzed and described in the EIS for the Medford District RMP.

1. Effects that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Based on the analysis documented in the EA, no significant adverse or beneficial effects will result from implementing the Selected Alternative (Alternative 3) in the Friese Camp Forest Management Project EA. All effects are of the type and within the magnitude of effects described in the EIS for the RMP.

The EA documented the site-specific analysis of effects to the environment. Required project design features (EA p. 16-21), an integral part of the Friese Camp Forest Management project, will ensure the potential for adverse effects on resources is avoided or minimized to the extent possible.

- a) Restoration thinning will reduce stand densities to increase landscape resiliency to environmental disturbances such as fire, insects, disease, and climate change. Thinning will create structural diversity by leaving small unthinned patches and creating small openings. The unthinned patches and openings will be from 0.1 to 0.25 acres in size with an irregular shape. They will occur in spatially random locations in the stand. Healthy ponderosa pine, sugar pine, Douglas-fir, and incense cedar will be favored for retention over white fir. Trees 150 years or older will be retained. The largest hardwoods (greater than 12 inches DBH) with full vigorous crowns will be retained to provide species diversity, canopy layers, and natural drought tolerance. Effects to forest condition were described in the EA on pages 36-38.
- b) Soil erosion from tractor yarding, road realignment, temporary route construction, road decommissioning, and water source restoration will be avoided or minimized through implementation of project design features (EA, p. 16-21). There may be a slight increase in soil erosion during the first year after soil-disturbing activities until previously vegetated surfaces exposed during project implementation stabilize and revegetate. The EA included possible effects to soil productivity (compaction) (p. 47-56) and localized road sediment (p. 60-69).
- c) The Friese Camp Forest Management Project will protect riparian reserves by implementing a 35-foot no-cut buffer on non-fish-bearing streams and a 60-foot no-cut buffer on fish-bearing streams during small diameter thinning in riparian reserves. A 190- or 210-foot riparian reserve buffer will be maintained during restoration thinning activities. For activities within the riparian reserve (small diameter thinning and water source restoration), specific riparian reserve project design features will be implemented (EA, p. 16-21). This will protect stream temperatures and stream sediment levels and prevent hazardous materials from entering streams.
- d) Fuel levels will increase immediately following forest management activities and prior to slash disposal; however, most fuels treatments will begin within 90 days of completion of harvest activities. After slash disposal treatments, fire hazard and risk within the watershed will be reduced (EA, p. 92-94).
- e) Timber harvest from the Friese Camp Forest Management project will provide economic benefits by providing jobs and contributing to community stability. The project will result in an estimated return to the Federal Treasury of about \$1.6 million under current market conditions and an estimated volume of 10 to 20 million board feet of timber. Direct employment from timber harvest and processing will result in approximately 112 full-time equivalent jobs. The effects to economics are discussed in the EA on pages 84-87.
- f) The Friese Camp Forest Management project will minimize or avoid the potential for the introduction or spread of existing noxious weed populations by implementing noxious weed project design features (EA, p. 16-21). Project design features and other mitigation measures will reduce the risk of spread or introduction of noxious weeds. The effects to noxious weeds are discussed in the EA in Appendix G, pages 189-193.
- g) Effects to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species are discussed in CEQ consideration number 9.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

The Friese Camp Forest Management project will not significantly or adversely affect health or safety because

- treatment activities will meet Occupational Safety and Health Association regulations for worker and public safety,

- fire hazard and risk will be reduced within the watershed (EA, p. 94), and
- prescribed burning operations will comply with the Oregon Smoke Management Plan.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The Friese Camp Forest Management Project Area does not contain and will not affect wild and scenic rivers, park lands, or ecologically critical areas. Prime farmlands are found within the project boundary on private lands; however, no projects are located within or would affect prime farmland. Where required, the BLM completed surveys and inventories to identify areas with unique characteristics. This allowed the BLM to design the project in such a way to avoid effects to these features as follows:

- Cultural surveys for the Project Area were completed and the project archaeologist assessed the project as “No Effect Determination, No Resources.”
- No projects will occur within wetlands; therefore, wetlands will not be destroyed, lost, or degraded in accordance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the Selected Alternative for the Friese Camp Forest Management project are similar in nature to many other projects that have been implemented across the Medford District BLM. The anticipated effects of the projects, documented in the EA, are disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA (p. 24-94). There is a continuing full range of debate, findings, and opinions about the potential effects of land management activities as evidenced by public comments received regarding this project. Opposition to the project is not the same as controversy. The Ninth Circuit 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]).

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The analysis did not indicate the effects of the Selected Alternative will involve any unique or unknown risks. The anticipated effects of implementing the Friese Camp Forest Management project are similar in nature to the effects estimated and observed for other projects implemented on lands in the Medford District BLM and are well supported with referenced literature throughout the EA.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations.

The decision to implement Alternative 3 of the Friese Camp 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. The Friese Camp Forest Management project will implement actions that meet management direction in the Medford District RMP (EA, p. 2, 4, and 7). Any future action will have its own set of conditions and will be evaluated through a future NEPA process.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant effects.

The analysis did not identify any significant cumulative effects outside of those addressed and anticipated in the EISs for the 1995 Medford District RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan. The project's interdisciplinary team performed analyses for various resources at multiple scales and included past, current, and foreseeable future actions on both private and Federal lands. The effects of Alternative 3 for each resource are disclosed in the EA in Chapter 3 (EA, p. 24-94).

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 historical resources.

The project archaeologist surveyed the Project Area for cultural and historic resources and none were identified. Implementation of Alternative 3, including project design features, will not affect objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. If cultural resources are located during project implementation, the project will be stopped and the BLM archaeologist will determine appropriate mitigation.

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.

T&E Plant Species

Friese Camp Project Area is outside the ranges of the four T&E species that occur in the Medford District—*Fritillaria gentneri*, *Lomatium cookii*, *Limnanthes floccosa* ssp. *grandiflora*, and *Arabis macdonaldiana*. Surveys for Special Status vascular species would have detected these species if present. The proposed actions will have a *no effect* ESA determination to T&E plant species and will not affect critical habitat because the project is outside their ranges and no sites or critical habitat occur within the units (EA, p. 88).

T&E Fish Species

The Friese Camp Project Area contains one T&E fish species, the federally threatened Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmon. The project fish biologist determined the actions proposed in this project will have a *no effect* ESA determination on coho salmon, coho critical habitat, or essential fish habitat; therefore, consultation was not required (EA, p. 92).

T&E Wildlife Species

The Friese Camp Project Area contains one T&E wildlife species, the federally threatened northern spotted owl. The project wildlife biologist determined the actions proposed in Alternative 3 is a *may affect, not likely to adversely affect* ESA determination because NRF and dispersal habitat will be maintained. Unique features across the Project Area will be retained following the principles of ecological forestry, resulting in spatial variability and structural complexity (Franklin, Mitchell, & Palik, 2007)¹. Unique features include patches of plant diversity, large snags and down woody debris, seeps, and springs. The retention of these features contributes to prey diversity for spotted owl foraging (EA, p. 78).

The Medford District BLM prepared a biological assessment for proposed timber harvest projects that included the Friese Camp project and submitted it to the US Fish and Wildlife Service on

¹ Franklin, J., Mitchell, R., and Palik, B. (2007). *Natural disturbance and stand development principles for ecological forestry*. General Technical Report, NRS-19. USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station, Newtown, PA.

January 10, 2012. The BLM received a biological opinion from US Fish and Wildlife Service on March 26, 2012. Their Opinion concluded that implementation of the proposed action would not jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl. The proposed action would not occur within designated critical habitat for the spotted owl and the proposed action is not likely to destroy or adversely modify proposed critical habitat (US Fish and Wildlife Service 2012)² (EA, p. 95).

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or Local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Selected Alternative 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, p. 11).

Finding

I have determined Alternative 3, the Selected Alternative, does not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement 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 has been completed within the context of the Medford District RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan. This conclusion is consistent with those plans and the anticipated effects are within the scope, type, and magnitude of effects anticipated and analyzed in those plans. The analysis of project effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of effects and the effects were determined to be insignificant.



Jon K. Raby
Field Manager
Butte Falls Resource Area

8/15/12
Date

² US Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. Formal consultation on the Fall FY 2012 timber harvest projects planned by the Medford District of the Bureau of Land Management (District), that are likely to affect the northern spotted owl (Reference Number 01EOFW00-2012-F-0049). Roseburg Field Office, Roseburg, OR.