



# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Medford District Office  
3040 Biddle Road  
Medford, Oregon 97504  
email address: BLM\_OR\_MD\_Mail@blm.gov

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1792(M060)

APR 4 2014

Dear Interested Public:

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Ashland Resource Area, is in the beginning stages of planning the ***South Fork Little Butte (SFLB) Forest Management Project***, located in the South Fork Little Butte Watershed (Enclosure 1).

### **What is BLM Proposing?**

The BLM is proposing to conduct forest management activities on land allocated as Matrix in the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP). The activities that may be proposed include pre-commercial thinning, commercial timber harvest, and post treatment fuels reduction. Transportation management activities, including road construction, maintenance, and decommissioning may also be proposed on BLM-administered lands in the South Fork Little Butte Creek area. Timber would be harvested using tractor, cable, or helicopter yarding systems. The proposed action would utilize a combination of commercial timber sale contract(s) and service contracts.

An estimated 3,230 acres have been identified for commercial harvest in the approximately 35,380 acre SFLB planning area. Pre-commercial thinning may also be proposed in some commercial units. An estimated 750 additional acres have been identified for pre-commercial thinning outside the commercial harvest units (Enclosure 1).

### **Why is BLM Proposing the SFLB Forest Management Project?**

The SFLB Project is designed to implement specific Management Objectives consistent with the BLM's 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) in the SFLB planning area. Specifically, this forest management proposal is designed to:

- Ensure sustainable forest production, and the renewable resources they provide, by managing forests to improve conifer forest vigor and growth (USDI 1995, p. 72-73);
- Provide forest products from Matrix land allocations in accordance with the direction in the Medford District's Resource Management Plan (USDI 1995, p. 72-73);
- Maintain a transportation system within the planning area that serves the management of resource program areas including timber management in an environmentally sound manner (USDI 1995, p. 84-88).
- Reduce existing system and nonsystem road mileage within key watersheds. If funding is insufficient to implement reductions, neither construct nor authorize through discretionary permits a net increase in road mileage in key watersheds (USDI 1995, p. 23, 87).

### Forest Management and Forest Products

One of the applicable laws governing a portion of BLM-administered lands in the South Fork Little Butte Creek sub-watershed is the Oregon and California Railroad and Coos Bay Wagon Road Grant Lands Act of 1937 (O&C Act), for which sustainable timber production is the primary purpose. Matrix lands are intended to achieve sustainable timber production and other forest commodities, providing jobs and contributing to community stability through both growth and harvest, while also promoting the development of fire-resilient forests (USDI 1995, p. 38). Timber products produced from the SFLB area would be sold in support of the District's Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) declared in the 1995 Medford District RMP (USDI 1995, pp. 17, 72-73).

Forest stands selected for treatment in the SFLB planning area are overstocked or have been impacted by disease, drought, or insects. As trees compete for limited water, nutrients, and growing space they become stressed and more susceptible to mortality from insects, forest pathogens, and drought. Forest thinning treatments are needed to maintain vigorously growing forest stands, which are more fire resilient and resistant to insect and disease attacks, in accord with sustained yield forestry and to capture tree mortality in compliance with RMP guidance (USDI 1995, p. 186).

The 1995 Medford District RMP adopted a set of silvicultural treatments for managing conifer forests on Matrix lands (USDI 1995, Appendix E, pp. 179-196). A brief summary of the silvicultural objectives and prescriptions for the SFLB Project is included (Enclosure 2). These silvicultural prescriptions, designed under the principles of sustained yield forestry, will respond to both forest and site conditions to meet the desired long term goals for each forest stand type. The silvicultural prescriptions will be described in further detail in the upcoming Environmental Assessment.

### Transportation Management

The existing transportation system in the South Fork Little Butte planning area may be insufficient to provide economically feasible operational access to BLM-administered lands in need of forest management. Road construction may be proposed to facilitate access to areas proposed for treatment in order to meet Matrix land objectives and the SFLB Project purpose and need.

Road conditions in some areas may be in need of maintenance or renovation to reduce the potential for road related erosion and sedimentation to stream courses and/or to accommodate vehicle traffic for which they were designated. Therefore, road maintenance and renovation may also be proposed.

As the SFLB planning area is within a Tier 1 Key Watershed, road densities should be reduced (if funding allows), or at minimum remain the same, therefore, road decommissioning will be an essential part of the proposed action as well. Please refer to the *Proposal Development* section below for more information.

## **Proposal Development**

### Watershed Assessment Update

The SFLB planning area falls within Little Butte Watershed Analysis Area. The Watershed Analysis was completed in 1997 and focused on the use of existing information available at that time to provide a baseline of information. This planning effort provides an opportunity to assess the current condition of BLM-administered lands in the South Fork Little Butte Creek sub-watershed and, where needed, update information pertaining to the physical and biological elements. Management Objectives and Recommendations provided by the Watershed Analysis are being considered and addressed as they apply to the SFLB Project proposal.

### Transportation Management Inventory and Assessment

An inventory and review of the existing transportation system (including non-system roads) is being conducted to aid in the assessment of the current condition, to evaluate the transportation system for an appropriate level of management, as well as to identify opportunities to reduce road densities. The process will specifically identify 1) roads that need maintenance to restore, repair, or improve road surfaces, culverts, and roadside drainage ditches in order to reduce road related erosion and sedimentation to stream courses; 2) roads that are no longer serving resource programs needs and whether they are contributing to sedimentation and riparian habitat fragmentation; 3) roads needed to provide access to forest stands identified to be in need of management; as well as 4) roads under existing agreements for private land access and reciprocal right-of-ways. Road construction, road decommissioning, both natural and mechanical, as well as road closures and road maintenance may be included in the proposed action to address the needs identified during the assessment process. The assessment is expected to be completed this summer (2014).

### **What is BLM Asking the Public?**

The BLM will be preparing an Environmental Assessment that will document the estimated environmental effects of the proposed SFLB Forest Management Project. In order to appropriately address issues relevant to the proposal in the forth-coming Environmental Assessment, we are seeking your input. If you would like to provide information on potential issues or concerns that the environmental analysis of this proposed action should address, or provide input on potential alternative action(s) that could meet the stated objectives for this proposed project, please submit your comments to Stephanie Kelleher, South Fork Little Butte Project, Medford District BLM, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504, or email to skellehe@blm.gov. Comments should be as specific as possible.

If you do not have comments at this time but would like to be kept informed as planning progresses on this project, please complete and return the enclosed "Response Form" (Enclosure 3) and your name will be maintained on the mailing list for this project. Your input will be most useful if it is received by **May 9, 2014**. However, comments will be accepted and reviewed up until the time a decision on the project is made. Those responding to this or other public notices concerning the South Fork Little Butte Project will be notified when the *South Fork Little Butte Creek Project Environmental Assessment* becomes available for public review.

Please note that all written submissions from private individuals in response to this notice, including your name, address, telephone number, email address, or other personal identifying information may be made available for public inspection and disclosure, unless you specifically request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your personal identifying information from public review or disclosure, you must state this at the beginning of your written comment and provide justification for doing so. We will honor such requests to the extent allowed by law, but you should be aware that release of that information may be required under certain circumstances. All submissions from organizations or businesses and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organization or business will be made available for public inspection and disclosure in their entirety.

Further information on this proposed project is available at the Medford District Office, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504 or by calling Stephanie Kelleher, Environmental Coordinator, at 541-618-2205 or Ted Hass, Assistant Field Manager, at 541-618-2253.

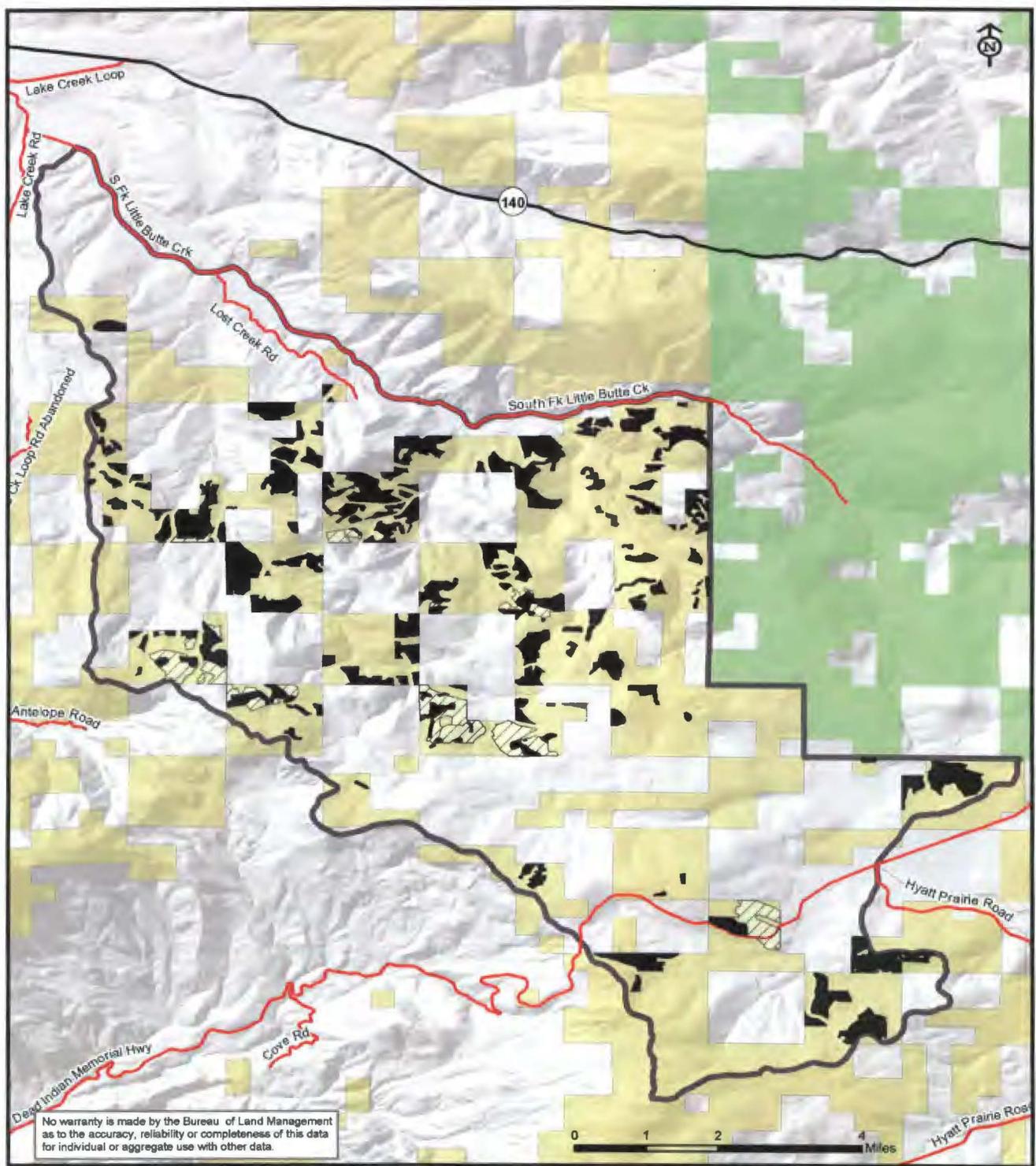
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Gerritsma". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "G".

John Gerritsma  
Field Manager  
Ashland Resource Area

Enclosures

# Enclosure 1. South Fork Little Butte Project Vicinity Map



|  |                               |  |                |
|--|-------------------------------|--|----------------|
|  | Bureau of Land Management     |  | State Highway  |
|  | Private                       |  | Municipal Road |
|  | U.S. Forest Service           |  | County route   |
|  | Proposed Commercial Units     |  |                |
|  | Proposed Non-Commercial Units |  |                |
|  | SFLB Planning Area            |  |                |

## South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project

April 2014





## **Enclosure 2. Summary of Silvicultural Objectives and Prescriptions**

The silvicultural objectives for treatment are as follows:

- 1) Reduce stand density to increase tree growth, quality, and vigor of the remaining trees;
- 2) Create diversified stand structure (height, age, and diameter classes);
- 3) Increase resilience/resistance of forest stands to wildfire, drought, insects, etc. by reducing stand densities and ladder fuels;
- 4) Increase growing space and decrease competition for large and/or legacy pine, oak, and cedar;
- 5) Create growing space for a new cohort of trees and/or increase the growth of existing understory trees;
- 6) Reduce understory stem density in the current stand and control the growth rates of existing understory trees for long term survivability;
- 7) Create regeneration opportunities for species that are shade intolerant and provide long term success or survival of less prominent species (ex: sugar pine);
- 8) Reduce the long-term effects of forest disease by reducing the spread of disease to existing overstory and understory trees.

### ***Density Management***

Stand prescription that would generally target smaller trees over larger trees (thin from below) to reduce stand density in order to promote the growth and structural development of the remaining stand. Density management can be used to promote desired stand characteristics for wildlife habitat based on canopy and basal area targets. Small openings and/or leave patches may be created in forest stands to promote desired structural features or wildlife habitat components in some cases.

### ***Density Management/Selection***

Stand prescription that would generally target low vigor trees over healthy trees (proportional thinning and low thinning) to reduce stand density and improve stand resiliency and individual tree health. This prescription can be used to accelerate the growth of remaining trees while promoting desired species that are best adapted to site conditions. Spatial distribution of leave trees should be based on tree condition (live crown ratio and crown form), as opposed to leaving trees based on a distance grid. Trees would be removed singly or in groups and stands will have a wide range of basal area or tree spacing targets based on stand types or conditions.

### ***Regeneration Harvest***

Two types of regeneration harvest are proposed in stands with declining growth rates or experiencing deterioration from high stand density levels, insects, disease, or other factors: Douglas-fir Regeneration Harvest and Disease Management. The minimum number of retained trees varies from 6 to 25 green conifer trees per acre greater than 20 inches DBH (diameter at breast height), depending on the silviculture method. The preferred retained trees would be the largest, full-crowned healthy trees. Leave trees may be arranged in clumps rather than in a uniform pattern throughout the stand. Commercial harvest would generally be followed up with prescribed burning or site prep and tree planting of mixed conifer species.

### ***Mortality Salvage***

Removing dead and dying trees singly or in groups for sawlogs, specialty products, or fuelwood. Mortality Salvage is proposed in stands or portions of stands where dead and dying trees are found. Dying trees are defined as a standing tree that has been severely damaged by forces such as fire, wind, ice, insects, or disease, such that in the judgment of an experienced forest professional or someone technically trained for the work, the tree is likely to die within a few years.

### ***Understory Reduction***

Understory Reduction is used to accomplish pre-commercial thinning and fuels reduction treatments for even and uneven-aged conifer stands. Understory Reduction consists of cutting small trees (generally less than 8 inches diameter) and vegetation with chainsaws and disposing of the material by hand-piling and burning or use of a lop and scatter method in lighter fuels. Understory Reduction increases tree growth rates and promotes horizontal and vertical structural diversity in stands. Understory Reduction is also used in stands where pines and shade-intolerant hardwood species are diminishing in vigor and numbers because of overcrowded stand density conditions. This prescription may be applied to understories and/or areas of high stocking of small trees in commercial stands proposed for harvest.

**Enclosure 3**

**INTEREST RESPONSE FORM**

ATTN: Ashland Resource Area Planning  
BLM's SFLB Forest Management Project  
3040 Biddle Road  
Medford, Oregon 97504

Please include me on the *South Fork Little Butte Forest Management Project* mailing list:

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I prefer to be kept informed via      Email      Snail mail

We are trying to save paper and conserve resources. Please respond if you wish to be kept informed, otherwise you will be taken off the mailing list.