



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

For the

SAMPSON COVE FOREST MANAGEMENT PROJECT

(DOI-BLM-OR-M060-2010-0024-EA)

This document also describes my finding regarding the significance of impacts resulting from the implementation of the Sampson Cove Project and whether there is a need to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

BACKGROUND

The Sampson Cove Forest Management Project is designed to implement specific Management Actions/Direction for Timber Resources, Wildlife Threatened and Endangered Species Management, Forest Health, and Roads Resource Programs described in the Bureau of Land Management's Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) (USDI 1995).

The proposed 504-acre Sampson Cove Project would harvest trees in conifer forest stands on BLM-administered land in the Walker Creek, and Upper and Lower Emigrant Creek drainages of the Upper Bear Creek Watershed. The Public Land Survey System description for the Sampson Cove Project Area is: T. 38 S., R. 2 E., Sections 3, 9 and 16; T. 38 S., R. 3 E., Sections 19, 29, 30, and 31; T. 39 S., R. 2 E., Sections 1, 3, 10, 11, and 15; and T. 39 S., R 3 E., Sections 6, 18, 19, 20, 30, 31, and 32; Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

I have considered both context and intensity of the impacts anticipated from the Sampson Cove Forest Management Project. I have determined that my decision to implement the proposal, as described in this Decision and under the Sampson Cove Forest Management EA, will not have any significant adverse effects. I considered the following criteria, suggested by CEQ (40 CFR 1508.27), for evaluating intensity or severity of the impact of the Sampson Cove Project.

The Sampson Cove Forest Management Project will:

1. *Not result in significant beneficial or adverse effects.*

- Soil productivity would be protected by requiring designated skid trails and using existing skid trails to the extent practical, limiting compacted area to 12 percent of the harvested area (EA p. 3-11); consistent with Medford District RMP guidance (RMP Appendix D, p. and within the effects anticipated under the Proposed Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/EIS p. 4-13; EA, p. 3-11).
- The proposal maintains watershed, sediment, and water runoff processes and riparian function.
 - There will be little to no additional sediment routed to stream channels with the proper implementation of Project Design Features (PDFs) and BMPs contained in Chapter 2 (EA, 3-21).
 - Road densities would not increase and there is a low potential for increased erosion and sediment delivery to streams (EA, 3-21).
 - Since there is no harvest proposed or burning within Riparian Reserves, stream temperatures would not be affected by the implementation of Alternative 2 (EA, 3-20).
 - Because harvest and yarding operations would not decrease stream shade, reduce future wood inputs, increase peak flows, negatively modify summer base flows or input sediment into aquatic habitats, they would not directly or indirectly affect the aquatic environment.
 - Construction of 500 feet of new road and its associated landing would not directly impact fisheries or aquatic resources” (EA, 3-33 to 3-35).
 - Construction and use of one temporary crossing over an intermittent stream would not affect fine sediment levels, but could input a shallow layer of clean rock substrate in the vicinity of the crossing, which would not negatively impact aquatic habitat (EA, p. 3-35).
- Under Alternative 2, silviculture treatments may have a long-term benefit because they reduce the high tree densities resulting in forest stands that are more ecologically sustainable for high fire return interval ecosystems (EA, p. 3-98).
- With vegetation inventory and weed treatment, existing noxious weed population sizes are expected to decrease and new establishments are expected to be minimized (EA, p. 3-57).
- A variety of wildlife habitats will remain untreated and unaffected throughout the upper Bear Creek Watershed to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species including species utilizing mature and older forest habitat. The Sampson Cove Project treats less than 4.5 percent of habitat located on BLM-lands in the upper Bear Creek Watershed.
- Within stands treated silvicultural prescriptions and required Project Design Features help to maintain and promote structural complexity within stands important to northern spotted owls as well as other wildlife species:
 - The Sampson Cove project would not downgrade or remove any existing northern spotted owl habitat within the home ranges of spotted owl sites. Only 4.1 % of the total NRF habitat located within the analysis area would receive treatment (EA, p. 3-68).
 - Across the larger landscape, more than 98% of existing suitable northern spotted owl habitat would remain (EA, p. 3-65).

- The treatments proposed under Alternative 2 would have long-term beneficial effects to northern spotted owls by increasing growth rates of the residual stand and accelerating the development of late-successional old growth characteristics within the treated areas than would occur if left untreated (EA, p. 3-66).
- The dispersion of treatment sites over a large area effectively maintains northern spotted owl prey populations within the Project Area (EA, p. 3-67). Any negative impacts to NSO prey are anticipated to only occur in the short term (<5 years) and would be spatially separated and well distributed across the owl analysis area (EA, 3p. -68).
- The Sampson Cove Project Area is used for dispersed types of recreation, however, should have no overall adverse affect on the desirability of the area for such recreation in the long-term.
 - The types of prescriptions called for in each unit of the Sampson Cove Project would not change the overall character of the landscape from the point of view of the average recreationist and therefore would not impact the desirability of the area for dispersed recreation in the long-term (EA, 3-108).
 - In the short-term, PCNST users will experience intermittent negative impacts as a result of the Samson Cove Project. To mitigate these impacts and improve the safety of PCNST users, signs would be placed at trail crossings both on the road and on the trail to alert trail users of the project and workers associated with the project of the location of the trail crossing (EA, 3-108).
 - No short term impacts to the winter trail recreationist would occur, as no timber harvest or log hauling would be allowed in/from Unit 29-1 from December 1st to April 1st (see Chapter 2, Project Design Features) (EA, 3-109).
- The Sampson Cove Project meets the Visual Resource Management objectives for VRM II and III of the 1995 Medford District RMP (EA, 3-311).

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

No aspects of the Sampson Cove Forest Management Project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety (EA, 3-115).

The fuel and fire hazard reduction elements of the project are likely to have a beneficial impact on public health and safety. The fire resilience for the planning area as a whole is improved due to the overall reduction in fire hazard within units treated (EA, 3-88).

Prescribed burning operations will follow all requirements of the Oregon Smoke Management Plan and the Department of Environmental Quality Air Quality and Visibility Protection Program, ensuring that smoke related impacts to public health and safety are mitigated (EA, p. 3-113 to 3-115). By implementing actions to minimize smoke effects and by complying with DEQ regulations, smoke associated with the proposed action will not reduce air quality of the Medford/Ashland area (EA, 3-115).

Concerns for the effects of increased traffic on public safety were raised during the scoping process. In response, project design features, such as sign placement on roads and intersections where hauling will occur, have be incorporated into the proposed action (EA, 2-26).

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

No wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers (or rivers suitable for wild and scenic designation), caves, parks, refuge lands, or areas of critical environmental concern exist in the Sampson Cove Project Area; all BLM-administered lands in the project area are designated as Matrix land, to be managed for timber production (EA, 1-2).

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 Sampson Cove 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.

The 2005 Report *Logging to Control Insects: The Science and Myths Behind Managing Forest Insect “Pests”*, also known as the Black Report, was submitted by several commenters to support their opinion that there is no evidence that logging can control bark beetles or defoliators once an outbreak occurs and in the long run could increase the likelihood of epidemics. The Black Report was reviewed by Forest Health Protection Entomologists from Region 6 of the U.S. Forest Service in November 2005, who concluded that the report contained many erroneous statements that were not even supported by the report’s cited literature and included many citations taken out of their proper context. The Black Report was reviewed by BLM silviculturists who concur with the findings reported by Region 6 Forest Service entomologists. Many papers cited in the report support BLMs approach to managing forests to prevent bark beetle epidemics.

A recent paper, “*The effectiveness of vegetation management practices for prevention and control of bark beetle infestations in coniferous forests of western and southern United States*”¹, reviews tree and forest stand factors associated with bark beetle infestations and analyzes the effectiveness of vegetation management practices for mitigating the negative impacts of bark beetles on forests. The review draws from the examination of 498 scientific publications concerning the topic referenced above and other related topics. The report concludes that while gaps do exist in information available for some forest cover types and common bark beetle species, thinning as a preventive measure to reduce the amount of bark-beetle caused tree mortality and its effectiveness is supported by scientific literature for most forest cover types including ponderosa pine and Douglas fir forests, which are the primary focus of concern for bark beetle infestations in the Sampson Cove Forest Management Project (EA, p. 3-105). This dispels

¹ Fettig, C.J.; Klepzig, K.D.; Billings, R.F.; Munson, A.S.; Nebeker, T.E.; Negrón, J.F.; Nowak, J.T. 2007. The effectiveness of vegetation management practices for prevention and control of bark beetle outbreaks in coniferous forests of the Western and Southern United States. *Forest Ecology and Management*. 238: 24–53.

the claim by some that scientific disagreement exists concerning the use of density management as a preventive measure to reduce bark beetle caused mortality.

This dispels the claim by some that scientific disagreement exists concerning the use of density management as a preventive measure to reduce bark beetle caused mortality.

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

The analysis does not show that this action will involve any unique or unknown risks outside of those addressed and anticipated in the Sampson Cove EA, the Medford District Resource Management Plan EIS, and the Northwest Forest Plan EIS. The silvicultural prescriptions and harvesting methods (tractor and cable) are the same methods used on a regular basis when harvesting commercially thinned timber sales. The anticipated effects of implementing the Sampson Cove Project are well supported with referenced literature throughout the EA, and are similar in nature to the effects estimated and observed for other timber sales implemented on the Medford BLM district.

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 the Sampson Cove Forest Management Project will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. The Sampson Cove Project will implement actions approved for forest management under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (which incorporated the Northwest Forest Plan) and analyzed under the Medford District Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement. It is therefore consistent with the types of projects envisioned in the BLM Resource Management Plan and Northwest Forest Plan.

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 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 & Environmental Consequences). No significant cumulative impacts were identified outside of those addressed and anticipated in the Final Medford District Proposed Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (1995) and 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, or impacts were otherwise determined to be insignificant.

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

The Sampson Cove Project Area was reviewed for the potential for adverse impacts to cultural resources. The project area was surveyed for cultural resources. All known sites will be avoided; therefore, the Sampson Project will have no adverse impacts on cultural resources.

The project would not result in restricting access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners or adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites. No sites have been identified in the Project Area. Executive Order 13007 (Indian Sacred Sites) (EA, 3-115).

This project would have no effect on Indian Trust Resources as none exist in the Project Area. This project was determined to have no adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This includes Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties. The proposed project would have no adverse effects on any known cultural resources (EA, 3-115).

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.

Northern spotted owls would likely be adversely affected by the Sampson Cove project. The Sampson Cove project is designed to maintain existing northern spotted owl habitat within the home range radius of spotted owl sites (EA, 1-2) with home ranges overlapping the project area. Across the larger landscape, more than 98 % of existing suitable northern spotted owl habitat would remain (EA, 3-65). Fuels reduction treatments proposed in Alternative 2 would not alter the overstory forest structure or remove key habitat components related to spotted owl habitat (EA, 3-67).

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), formal consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service concluded in its Biological Opinion (# 13420-2010-F-0107) that the District's proposed action is *not likely to jeopardize* the continued existence of the spotted owl (p.64).

The Pacific fisher (*Martes pennanti*) was petitioned for listing as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act on December 12, 2000. In 2003 the USFWS released their notice of 90-day petition finding and initiation of status review (68 Federal Register, No. 132, 41169-41174) and in 2004 published their Notice of 12-month petition finding, concluding that listing fishers as threatened was warranted, but was precluded by higher priority listing actions (Federal Register Vol. 69, No. 68, April 8, 2004, 18769-18792). The species remains a USFWS candidate species (USDI, USFWS 2004, 71 Fed. Reg. 53777, Sept. 12, 2006).

No denning sites for fishers are known to occur in the project area and the Sampson Cove Project is not expected to cause direct mortality of any fishers. Any negative effects to fisher prey species due to vegetation removal would be short-term as understory vegetation would recover within 5 years, and effects would be minimal because large amounts of untreated habitat would continue to provide areas for fisher to forage. Fishers also have very large home ranges and would adjust to any effects caused by disturbance by moving to areas within their home range unaffected by harvest activities (EA p. 3-69). No road construction would occur in fisher habitat and planned road construction is minimal (about 500 feet). The implementation of Alternative 2 would not contribute to the need to federally list the fisher as threatened or endangered because habitat features, such as large snags and coarse wood, would be retained throughout the Project Area, which would provide habitat for denning and resting (EA, 3-70).

There would be no effect on sites of special status or survey and manage botanical species as all sites will be protected as recommended by seasonal restrictions or no treatment buffers, or a combination of both.

The implantation of the Sampson Cove project has been determined to have “*No Effect*” to Southern Oregon Northern California (SONC) coho salmon, CCH, or EFH. (EA, p. 3-32).

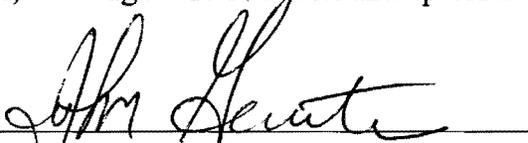
10. Not Violate a Federal, State, Local, or Tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment.

Through analysis documented in the EA, the BLM has determined that with implementation of required Project Design Features, the proposed action would not threaten a violation of any federal, state, or local environmental protection laws.

This project was reviewed for the potential for disproportionately high or adverse effects on minority or low income populations; no adverse impacts to minority or low income populations will occur (*Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)* (EA, 3-115).

FINDING

I have determined the Sampson Cove Forest Management project does not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR § 1508.27), with regard to context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA, my understanding of the project, review of project analysis, and review of public comments. 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 Medford District Resource Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan. The anticipated effects are within the scope, type, and magnitude of effects anticipated and analyzed in those plans.



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8/12/10
Date

REFERENCES

- United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. 2010. Biological Opinion on the Summer 2010 Timber Harvest Activities Proposed by the Medford District of the Bureau of Land Management that are Likely to Adversely Affect the Northern Spotted Owl. FWS Reference Number 13420-2010-F-0107. On file Medford District BLM, Medford, OR.
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- U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI), Bureau of Land Management, Medford District. 1995. Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan. Medford, OR.
- U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI), Bureau of Land Management, Medford District. 1994. Medford District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. Medford, OR.