United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
3040 BIDDLE ROAD MEDFORD, OREGON 97504

PROGRAMMATIC INTEGRATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT
NEPA# DOI-BLM-OR-M000-2012-0001-EA
Butte Falls Resource Area
Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration
December 2014

DRAFT DECISION RECORD

I. INTRODUCTION

The BLM proposes reducing hazardous fuels and restoring oak woodland and savannah vegetation communities in the Table Rocks Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) of the Butte Falls Resource Area (see attached map). The project would contribute to hazardous fuels reduction, and restoring oak woodland forests and savannahs across 202 acres of BLM-managed land as identified in the 2013 *Table Rocks Management Area, Management Plan*. This project would thin out small diameter trees and decadent brush to create a more open understory and reduce encroachment of young conifers in historically oak and savannah dominant communities. Burn treatments would stimulate native species dependent on fire for reproduction and would create a mosaic effect to help restore the area to conditions closer to the natural fire regime. All treatments will be done by non-commercial, manual means (such as chainsaws and hand tools). No yarding systems (helicopter, cable, or tractor) will be used. Surface and ladder fuels would be reduced by slashing, hand piling, swamper burning, hand pile burning, broadcast burning, and underburning. Maintenance of these treatments is proposed to occur over 5-10 years following initial treatments and would be driven by the condition of the stand and re-growth of cut vegetation.

The treatment objectives are to:

- Improve stand growth and maintain health and vigor by reducing moisture stress on the older cohorts, improving and maintaining structural/species diversity and reintroducing fire as an ecological process (IVM EA, p.16).
- Implement mosaic thinning to mimic natural disturbance patterns.
- Retain moderate to dense patches within a thinned landscape to protect and enhance habitat values.
- Reduce encroachment of young conifers on the edges of historic dominant and co-dominate oak and savannah communities (grasslands and meadows) (IVM EA, p.17 & 18).
- Stimulate native species dependent on fire for reproduction (IVM EA, p.16 & 17).

- Restore fuel loading and arrangement to levels characteristic of low and mixed severity fire regimes. Reintroduce fire in a landscape that has become overly dense and homogenous.
- Reduce risk of large-scale fire event.

The Butte Falls Resource Area Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project is consistent with the projects described in the 2012 Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project (IVMP) Environmental Assessment (EA), which was prepared under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan.

The IVMP EA was developed to provide a tool to accomplish work that promotes healthy and resilient forest landscapes and species conservation, and provides forest products that contribute to the sustainability of local communities and industries. As stated in the IVMP EA (p. 2),

> "All proposed projects will include a variety of vegetation management treatments designed to attain multiple management objectives identified for various land allocations using an IVM approach. . . . the focus of this programmatic analysis is on potential sets of actions that can be implemented, if and when funding becomes available, and more quickly and efficiently than if each project were analyzed on its own. This EA will not be used strictly for implementation of fuels or silviculture projects; the intent is to implement projects that meet multiple objectives. Projects proposed under the IVM programmatic EA will not overlap any other active NEPA projects; however, they could be part of a larger landscape planning effort, or could be implemented as stand-alone projects. It is expected that decisions under this programmatic EA will create significant management efficiencies.
>
> After the public review period for this EA, it will become available for each of the three Resource Areas (Ashland, Butte Falls, and Grants Pass) to use for specific projects. The Resource Areas will propose and develop individual projects consistent with descriptions and stipulations in this EA. Project specific assessments will be completed prior to project decisions to assure that the effects of the suite of activities proposed under this EA do not exceed the effects disclosed in this EA."

Other Integrated Vegetation Management projects are anticipated to occur across the Medford District. The IVMP does not preclude these other IVM projects that would address a wider variety of activities than are available under this EA and that would be more appropriately analyzed as a stand-alone project. For example, a watershed-wide landscape management project that includes commercial timber harvest, road construction or decommissioning, recreation projects, silviculture treatments, and fuel hazard reduction, as well as IVM treatments, would be more appropriate to analyze as a stand-alone project rather than be implemented under this EA.

The EA details the steps that will be completed prior to signing Decision Records under the IVMP. "Project proposals/draft Decision Records would be written and posted on the Medford District BLM website and available for at least 15 days for public review" (EA, p. 2). Each Resource Area will conduct appropriate outreach for each project. "Following public review, Decision Records would be published for each project under the Forest Management Regulations (43 CFR 5003), and subject to Administrative Remedies in accordance with these regulations" (EA, p. 2). This is one of those project proposals/Decision Records.

This Draft Decision Record (DR) is for the Butte Falls Resource Area Table Rock Hazardous Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Community Restoration project, which implements the IVMP in the Gold Hill-Rogue River and Shady Cove-Rogue River 5th field watersheds in the Butte Falls Resource Area.

All projects implemented under the EA are required to be developed in cooperation with appropriate BLM resource specialists (minimally silviculture, forestry, soils, hydrology, wildlife, fisheries, botany, recreation, and fire and fuels) for habitat considerations and treatment options.

- Projects are to be designed in context with other projects in the watersheds in which they are planned.
- Interdisciplinary review (including at minimum, soil scientist/hydrologist) will determine applicable best management practices (BMP) on a project-specific basis.
- Site-specific BMPs are incorporated for each project.

Table DR-1 outlines the pre-project documentation completed for this project.

Table DR-1. Pre-project Clearances for the Butte Falls Resource Area Table Rocks Fuels Reduction and Restoration project

Clearance/Survey Type	Date Completed	Specialist Responsible	Reference
Botany—Survey and Manage/Special Status Species	2013	Marcia Wineteer	Not Applicable
Botany—T&E	2013	Marcia Wineteer	Not Applicable
Botany Consultation	No Effect; surveys completed and no sites found	(Fish and Wildlife Service 2014); (Bureau of Land Management 2013)	
Wildlife—Surveys		Dave Roelofs	Not Applicable
Wildlife—Habitat Assessment		Dave Roelofs	Not Applicable
Wildlife Consultation	No Negative Effect on listed species; Non-habitat for Northern Spotted Owls and Fishers. Project complies with the Vernal Pool Biological Opinion (BO) #13420-2011-F-0064.		
Project-specific Wildlife Consultation		Dave Roelofs	Wildlife Consultation Monitoring Report 11/10/2014
Slope Stability Assessment		Amy Meredith	Timber Production Capability Class

Table DR-1. Pre-project Clearances for the Butte Falls Resource Area Table Rocks Fuels Reduction and Restoration project			
Clearance/Survey Type	**Date Completed**	**Specialist Responsible**	**Reference**
Stream Surveys		Shawn Simpson	Used National Hydrography Dataset
Site-specific BMPs Identified		Shawn Simpson	PDFs with *
Cultural Resources Surveys		Cheryl Foster-Curley	Arch Report #OR110-15-37
Cultural Resources Consultation		Cheryl Foster-Curley	Arch Report #OR110-15-37

II. DECISION

It is my decision to implement Alternative 2, the proposed action, as described in the *Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM-OR-M000-2012-0001-EA).

The Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project will implement 202 acres of non-commercial hazardous fuel reduction and oak woodland and savannah restoration treatments in the Table Rocks ACEC, including maintenance treatments for up to 10 years. The Project Area is located on BLM-Administered land in Township 35 South, Range 2 West, Sections 34 and 35 and Township 36 South, Range 2 West, Sections 1, 4, and 9.

Treatment Descriptions

- Retain down wood, snags, and other unique legacy features.
- Cut 80-90% of decadent shrubs to allow regeneration of browse species. Ten to twenty percent of shrub patches will be left untreated for bird and small mammal cover.
- Seed and plant with native species as appropriate to restore sites and for strategic control of invasive species.
- Cut shrub species (wedgeleaf ceanothus and manzanita) more than 1 foot tall and less than 12 inches in diameter (at 1 foot above ground level) to a maximum of 45-foot by 45-foot spacing.
- Avoid uniform treatments: work with existing stand patterns of both trees and shrubs to thin across a range of intensities and topographic positions. Plan for fire to further reduce density and increase structural diversity.

Oak Woodland, Shrublands, and Savannah Conifer Encroachments; and Hazardous Fuel Reduction

- Cut small conifers less than 12 inches that are encroaching on oak woodlands and savannahs.

- Retain areas where pine or small groups of conifers are desired; they will be retained in clusters approximately 25 feet apart.
- Retain Pine and Douglas-fir in older cohorts.
- Prune conifers 6 to 14 inches dbh up to 10 feet above ground level.
- Cut oak clusters as single stems with regard to encroaching vegetation.
- Adhere to the IVM guidelines for treating single-stem, oak cluster and continuous woodland treatments.
- Plant disturbed areas if needed to restore oak, pine and native grasses, using appropriate site-specific species.
- Prescribed burn will be used to reduce small tree and shrub competition and to stimulate native species dependent on fire for reproduction.
- Fuel hazard reduction and prescribed burning will occur on BLM-administered lands in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) in the project area. The project addresses the need to better protect the lives, property, and natural resources within the neighborhoods of Sams Valley and White City, Oregon from the risk of high intensity wild fires.

Meadow & Grassland Restoration

- Broadcast burning will be used to reduce grass thatch build-up of native or nonnative grasses. After broadcasting burning, sites will be seeded or planted with appropriate site-specific native plants to restore native plant composition.

Project Design Features

The following project design features developed for the Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project will be applied to the Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project to eliminate or reduce impacts to the environment.

Soils, Productivity, and Water Quality

- No treatment within unstable areas designated as Riparian Reserves.
- Hand fire-lines will be constructed based on gradient and erosion class according to District guidelines (RMP p.167) to prevent offsite erosion.
- Fire containment lines will be sufficiently blocked at all access points to preclude OHV use and off-trail hiking. This would include such measures as placing boulders, logs and slash; falling trees less than 8 inches dbh; signing; or other actions as necessary.
- Firelines for underburns and broadcast burns will be constructed manually.
- Understory and broadcast burns will be conducted only when a light to moderate burn can be achieved (spring or fall conditions). The objective is to retain no more than 50% of the mound depth / duff layer around trees, minimize tree stress, and adverse effects on tree roots and foliage.
- Treatments (including hand piles) will not occur within 60 feet of perennial streams, springs, seeps, ponds, wetlands, and vernal pools when water is present.

- Treatments (including hand piles) will not occur within 35 feet of intermittent streams.
- Riparian hardwood species such as willow, ash, maple, alder, and black oak will not be cut.
- Ignition for understory burning will not occur within 100 feet of perennial streams, springs, seeps, ponds and wetlands.
- Ignition for understory burning will not occur within 50 feet of intermittent streams.
- Broadcast burning will not occur in Riparian Reserves.

Oil and Hazardous Materials & Emergency Response

- During operations, the operator will be required to have a BLM-approved spill plan or other applicable contingency plan. In the event of any release of oil or hazardous substance, as defined in Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 340-142-0005 (9)(d) and (15), into the soil, water, or air, the operator would immediately implement the site's plan. As part of the plan, the operator will be required to have spill containment kits present on the site during operations. The operator will be required to be in compliance with OAR 629-605-0130 of the Forest Practices Act, Compliance with the Rules and Regulations of the Department of Environmental Quality. Notification, removal, transport, and disposal of oil, hazardous substances, and hazardous wastes will be accomplished in accordance with OAR 340-142, Oil and Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Requirements, contained in Oregon Department of Environmental Quality regulations.
- Equipment refueling will be conducted within a confined area outside Riparian Reserves.
- All hazardous materials and petroleum products will be stored in durable containers outside of Riparian Reserves. Equipment containing toxic fluids are not to be stored in Riparian Reserves.

Wildlife

<u>Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp</u>
Applies to the 20 acres in Township 36 South, Range 2 West, Section 9

- No dumping, burning, and/or burying of rubbish, garbage, or other artificial wastes or fill materials.
- No burning (handpile burning, underburning, or broadcast burning) in vernal pools when water is present.
- No construction of fire line trails.
- No use of pesticides, herbicides or other toxic chemicals.

<u>Other Wildlife Species</u>

- Duff and slash will be pulled back from the base of snags greater than 20 inches prior to underburning.

- All non-hazardous snags and coarse woody debris will be retained in units. If it is necessary to fall snags for safety reasons, they will remain on site as down wood. All existing, naturally-occurring large dead and down woody debris (≥12 inches in diameter) will remain on site.
- In the Riparian Reserve, riparian dependent tree species will be maintained as necessary to ensure the diversity of the stand. Activities in this area will be designed to ensure that habitat conditions for the wildlife and plant species that use this zone are not degraded.
- Approximately 10 to 20% of each fuels treatment unit greater than 10 acres will remain untreated. The no treatment areas should be ¼ to 1 acre, or larger if they are linked to other no treatment areas designated for other resource concerns.
- Restrict all chainsaw operations, heavy equipment use, and prescribed burning up to ¼ mile no line of site and ½ mile line of site around active raptor sites, from January 1 to August 15.

Botany

Fritillaria gentneri (Gentner's fritillary) habitat

- Two year surveys in suitable habitat.
- Maintain a minimum 25 foot no-treatment buffer around sites. Manual treatments may occur within buffers during dormant period, but a minimum of 40% canopy cover would be retained. Burning, hand brush/tree removal, sowing site-appropriate native grasses, etc. may occur through known site occurrences during the dormancy period (July 1-Feb 28) if the net result improves habitat for the species.
- Cut material would be piled and pile burned a minimum of 25 feet outside buffer.

Special Status Plants

- Underburning or broadcast burning containing Southern Oregon buttercup *(Ranunculus austro-oreganus*) will be done prior to March 31.
- Underburning or broadcast burning containing Oregon fairy poppy (*Meconella oregana*) will be done before February 1.
- Cutting brush within Oregon fairy poppy sites is acceptable during the dormant season (July 1 to February 1), but slash will be piled outside population boundary.
- Burn piles and grasslands dominated by nonnative grasses and noxious weeds will be seeded with native grasses and forbs.
- Broadcast burning vernal pool habitat will occur when rare plants are dormant (September 1 to February 1). Mounds and vernal pool edges will be seeded with site appropriate native grass and forb species after burning.

Fuels Management

- Piles will be no larger than 8 feet by 8 feet in size and cover no more than 5% of the treatment area.
- Firelines constructed in suitable habitat will be raked to pull the created berm back over the line and seeded with an appropriate native seed.

- Burn piles within 50 feet of established weed populations or along weed infested roads will be seeded with an appropriate native grass.

Noxious Weeds

- Meadows containing nonnative grasses and noxious weeds will be seeded with native grass and forbs after broadcast burning or pile burning.

Cultural Resources

- Archaeological or paleontological sites occurring within activity areas will be flagged for avoidance and would be identified to the project proponent / administrator on a map.
- Sites that are located within prescribed fire units will have hand lines constructed around them as necessary to protect the resource from fire.
- Sites that are within treatment units may be hand-treated to reduce fuel loading, and to lessen their visibility on the landscape. These sites would be identified prior to project implementation by district archaeological staff.
- All materials cut from sites, as well as any other cut materials will be piled off-sites for burning purposes. The District archaeological staff will work with District staff to identify suitable areas for pile burning.
- Sensitive areas (such as flagged sites) will be discussed with the contractor to insure that they understand the need to avoid those areas. The contractor will also be informed that they cannot collect artifacts or disturb cultural resource sites in any way.

Recreation/Visuals

- In units adjacent to hiking trails, barriers of denser vegetation will be left next to the trails as identified and coordinated by the Butte Falls Outdoor Recreation Planner and Fire/Fuels Specialist.
- All firelines will be raked to pull the created berm back over the line and seeded with an appropriate native seed to discourage hiking use.
- In units visible from hiking trails, any hand piles will be stacked further away from the trail, and covered with neutral-colored materials.

III. DECISION RATIONALE

The Butte Falls Resource Area Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project conforms to the treatments described for oak woodlands, shrublands, and savannahs described under Alternative 2 in the IVMP EA (p. 15-19). This project also meets the objective for Fire Management in the Medford District ROD/RMP to use prescribed fire for wildfire hazard reduction, restoration of desired vegetation conditions, management of habitat, and silvicultural treatments (ROD/RMP, p.89). Additionally, the project meets the objective for Forest Health in the Medford District ROD/RMP to reduce tree mortality and restore the vigor, resiliency, and stability of forest stands (ROD/RMP, p.62).

This project has been reviewed by the Butte Falls Resource Area staff and appropriate PDFs will be incorporated into the project. Based on the attached NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Programmatic Environmental Assessment Review, I have determined the proposed action

involves no significant impact to the human environment and no further environmental analysis is required.

Plan Consistency

Based on the information in the IVMP EA and project record, and comments received from the public regarding this project, I conclude that the decisions documented in this Decision Record are consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan *(1995)*; *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994); Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001); Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan (1998); and the Table Rocks Management Plan (2013)*. They are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations, and Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice. They will not, per Executive Order 13212, impact energy development, production, supply, and/or distribution.

IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

No adverse impacts to the sites of cultural or historical significance were identified during project planning. One site was located in the project units and it will be protected by avoidance through the application of the Project Design Features described above.

The Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Klamath Tribe, Burns Paiute Tribe, Coquille Indian Tribe, and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were invited to participate on issue development and important resource identification during the IVMP EA scoping and the EA's public comment period. Jackson County Commissioners and the Oregon Department of Forestry were also contacted. No responses were received.

The Federally recognized tribes in the Medford District BLM boundary were contacted during scoping for the Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project in November 2014. The purpose of the consultation effort was to solicit information on any areas of concern in or near the project area. At this time, the tribes have not identified any cultural resource concerns for the fuel reduction or restoration activities.

Botany Tails #01EOFW00-2014-I-0013

The Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project area is within the range of three federally endangered plants – Gentner's fritillary (*Fritillaria gentneri*), Cook's lomatium (*Lomatium cookii*), and Large flowered meadowfoam (*Limnanthes pumila* ssp. *grandiflora*). Surveys were conducted for these species, as directed in the programmatic consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service. No sites were discovered in the proposed units. Therefore, this project would have no effects to T&E plants.

Wildlife Tails #13420-2011-F-0064

There are no known spotted owl sites in the project area and no spotted owl habitat will be treated; therefore, consultation for this species is not needed. Likewise, there is no known presence of fisher in the project area and there is no fisher denning or resting habitat in the project area. The Project Design Features above include the recommendations from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion for the vernal pool fair shrimp (*branchinecta lynchi*). The project will have a positive effect on the species since it will not enter vernal pools when the fairy shrimp are active and project activities will restore native plant communities.

V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement for the IVMP EA began on November 14, 2011 with the mailing of a scoping letter to approximately 660 residents and landowners near or adjacent to BLM parcels within the planning area; Federal, state, and county agencies; Tribes; private organizations; and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type.

The BLM held a public meeting on January 19, 2012 and also gathered information through questionnaires, personal discussions, and comment letters, which provided public input to BLM for consideration in the IVMP EA. Extensive discussions with individuals interested in the project were held throughout the planning process.

A formal 30-day public comment period was provided for the EA during August and September 2012. The public was notified of this via a newspaper notice and letters to individuals, Tribes, organizations, and government entities who expressed a wish to continue to be informed about the project.

A Draft Decision Record will be posted on the Medford District BLM Web site and will be available for a 15-day public review. Following the public review, the notice of the Decision Record will be published in the *Medford Mail Tribune*. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the *Medford Mail Tribune* will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

The decision described in this document is a forest management decision and is subject to protest by the public. In accordance with Forest Management Regulations at 43 CFR Subpart 5003 Administrative Remedies, protests of this decision may be filed with the authorized officer, Jeanne Klein within 15 days of the publication date of the notice of final decision in the *Medford Mail Tribune* newspaper in Medford, Oregon. The protest must clearly and concisely state which portion or element of the decision is being protested and the reasons why the decision is believed to be in error.

43 CFR § 5003.3 subsection (b) states, "Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision." This precludes the acceptance of electronic mail (email) or facsimile (fax) protests. **Only written and signed hard**

copies of protests delivered to the Medford District Office will be accepted. The Medford District Office is located at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon.

43 CFR § 5003.3 subsection (c) states: "Protests received more than 15 days after the publication of the notice of decision or the notice of sale are not timely filed and shall not be considered." Upon timely filing of a protest, the authorized officer shall reconsider the project decision to be implemented in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available to him. The authorized officer shall, at the conclusion of the review, serve the protest decision in writing to the protesting party(ies). Upon denial of a protest, the authorized officer may proceed with the implementation of the decision as permitted by regulations at 5003.3(f).

In accordance with BLM Forest Management Regulation 43 CFR § 5003.2 (a and c), the effective date of this decision, as it pertains to actions which are not part of an advertised timber sale, will be the publication date of the Notice of Decision and FONSI in the *Medford Mail Tribune*. This date applies to the Butte Falls Resource Area Hazardous Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Community Restoration project. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the *Medford Mail Tribune* will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

If no protest is received by the close of business (4:30 p.m.) within 15 days after publication of the decision notice, this decision will become final. If a timely protest is received, the project decision will be reconsidered in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available, and the Butte Falls Resource Area will issue a protest decision.

Jeanne Klein Date
Acting Field Manager
Butte Falls Resource Area

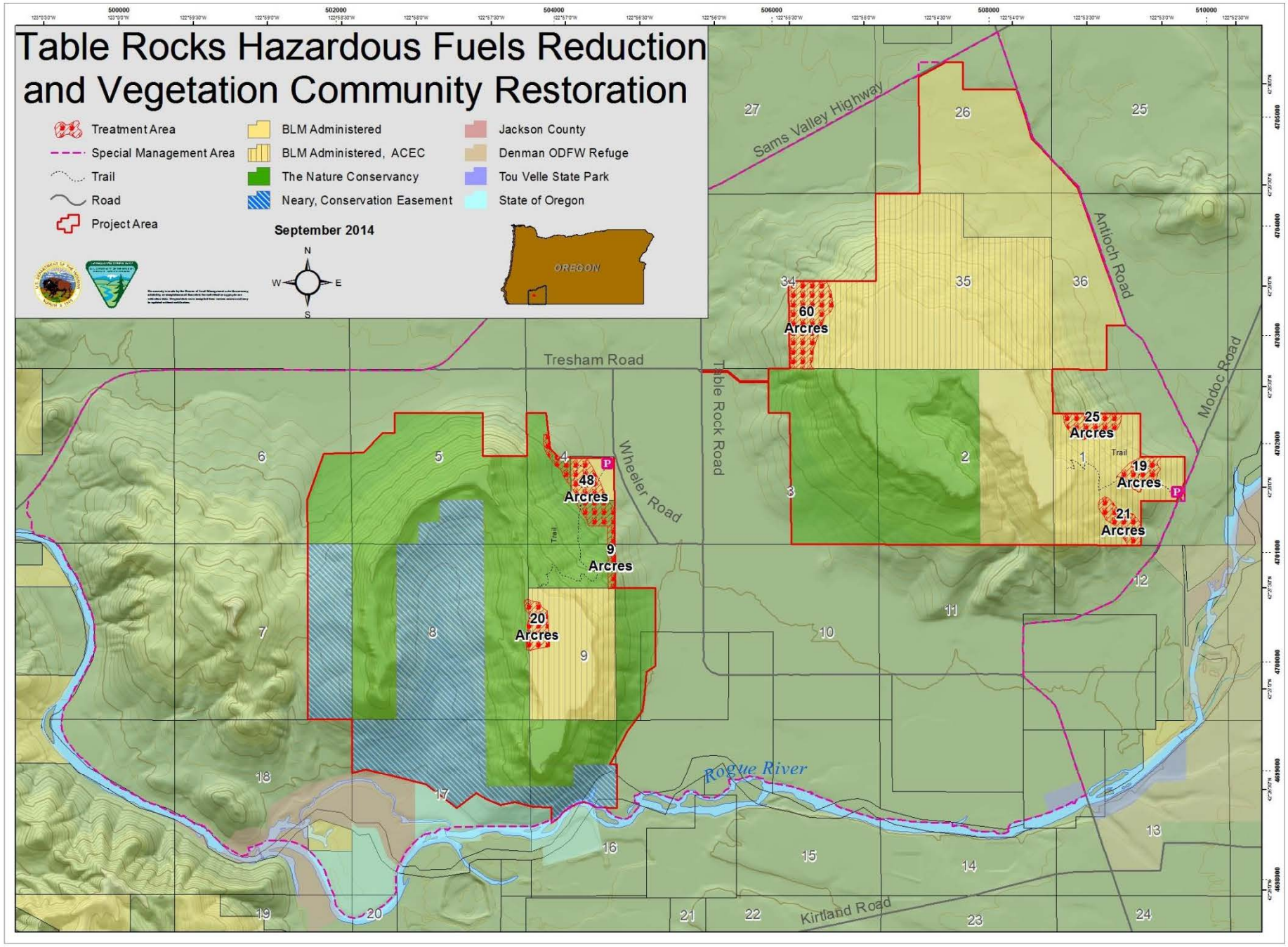
Table Rocks Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Vegetation Community Restoration
Treatment Area
Special Management Area
Trail
Road
Project Area
BLM Administered
BLM Administered, ACEC
The Nature Conservancy
Neary, Conservation Easement
Jackson County
Denman ODFW Refuge
Tou Velle State Park
State of Oregon
September 2014
N
W
E
S
OREGON
Sams Valley Highway
Antioch Road
Modoc Road
Tresham Road
Table Rock Road
Wheeler Road
Kirtland Road
Rogue River
60 Acres
25 Acres
19 Acres
21 Acres
48 Acres
9 Acres
20 Acres
Trail

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD INTERAGENCY OFFICE
3040 BIDDLE ROAD
MEDFORD, OREGON 97504

PROGRAMMATIC INTEGRATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
NEPA# DOI-BLM-OR-M000-2012-0001-EA

I. INTRODUCTION

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has analyzed integrated vegetation management activities for forest stands located across the Medford District. BLM's interdisciplinary planning team designed the Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project (IVMP) on the Medford District based on current resource conditions in the project area, and to meet the objectives and direction of the 1995 Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (1995 ROD/RMP). The proposals presented and evaluated in the IVMP Environmental Assessment (NEPA # DOI-BLM-OR-M000-2012-0001-EA) reflect what the planning team believes to be the best balance of resource conditions, resource potential, and competing management objectives. Integrated vegetation management projects authorized under Decision Records will be limited to a maximum of 5,000 acres per year and dispersed across the District. No more than 10% of BLM land in a fifth field watershed will be treated under this EA in any one year.

Currently, the BLM proposes reducing hazardous fuels, and restoring oak woodland and savannah vegetation communities in the Table Rocks Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) of the Butte Falls Resource Area. This project would reduce hazardous fuels and restore oak woodland forests and savannahs on 202 acres of BLM-managed land by thinning small diameter trees and removing decadent brush to create a more open understory and reduce encroachment of young conifers in historically oak and savannah dominant communities. Burn treatments would stimulate native species dependent on fire for reproduction and would create a mosaic effect to help restore the area to conditions closer to the natural fire regime.

II. BACKGROUND

The general planning area for implementation of projects under the IVMP covers lands managed by the Medford District BLM. Lands within the area are a "checkerboard" of federal, private, county, and state ownership totaling approximately 3 million acres. Of those lands, approximately 860,000 acres are lands under the administration of the BLM. These lands are in a variety of land use allocations (e.g., Applegate Adaptive Management Area [AMA], Matrix, Late-Successional Reserve (LSR)).

The BLM began public outreach for this project on November 14, 2011 by sending a scoping letter to approximately 660 residents and landowners near or adjacent to BLM parcels within the

planning area; federal, state, and county agencies; tribal governments; private organizations; and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type. All public input was considered by the planning and interdisciplinary team in developing the proposals and in preparing the EA.

The BLM held a public meeting on January 19, 2012, and gathered information through questionnaires, personal discussions, and comment letters, which provided public input to BLM for consideration in the EA.

The EA analyzed treatments of vegetation communities that are not generally viable for commercial timber sales, but exhibit an ecological need (e.g., habitat restoration, enhanced structural complexity, improved forest stand growth and vigor, reduced risk of catastrophic wildfires). The project proposes a variety of activities to address the purpose and need for the project, such as treatments for restoration of oak woodlands, meadows, shrublands, and grasslands.

The IVMP EA was available for public review from August 25 through September 25, 2012. It incorporated analysis of the proposed actions and addressed issues raised in public scoping comments. During the public review period, the BLM received six comment letters, mainly in support of the project, but expressing several concerns. For a summary of public comments, see Appendix A, Public Comment Summary and Response.

In designing the IVMP to address current resource conditions, the BLM interdisciplinary team was aware of and sensitive to the public's range of views and values while complying with a variety of resource management mandates. As a result, the IVMP is an integrated and multi-faceted plan that balances these factors and objectives.

III. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BLM completed consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for the activities addressed in this project (Tails#13420-2011-F-0064) for the vernal pool fairy shrimp (*branchinecta lynchi*). The project includes the Project Design Criteria provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion. The project will have a positive effect on the species since it will not enter vernal pools when the fairy shrimp are active and project activities will restore native plant communities.

Programmatic consultation (Tails# 01EOFW00-2014-I-0013) to analyze the effects on Gentner's fritillary (*Fritillaria gentneri*), Large flowered meadowfoam (*Limnanthes pumila* ssp. *grandiflora*), and Cook's lomatium (*Lomatium cookii*) from various activities was completed in 2014. The Biological Assessment and Letter of Concurrence include Project Design Criteria (PDCs) regarding predisturbance survey requirements and protection measures that apply to different management actions if sites occur in the project area. Predisturbance surveys may require one to two years of visits, depending on the project type and species. There is no critical habitat for T&E plants within the project area. The BLM conducted surveys for T&E plants in the proposed treatment units and did not discover any sites. Therefore, the proposed action would be "no effect" to T&E plants.

In accordance with section 7 of the ESA, the BLM analyzed project activities for their potential to affect Southern Oregon/Northern California (SONC) coho salmon or their designated critical

habitat. The BLM also analyzed these activities for their potential to affect Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The project is not expected to affect species or their critical habitat; therefore, consultation is not required. The project is a No Effect action for SONC, critical habitat, and EFH.

The project will not adversely impact any sites of cultural or historical significance. One site was located in the project units and it will be protected by avoidance through the application of the Project Design Features described above.

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Siletz, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Burns Paiute Tribe, Klamath Tribes, and Coquille Indian Tribe were notified of this project during scoping. The Jackson County Commissioners and Jackson County Forestry, Commissioners, and Public Works were also contacted. The BLM did not receive responses from these groups.

IV. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

A. Plan Conformance

Based on the information in the Integrated Vegetation Management Project EA and project record, and from the letters and comments received from the public about the project, I conclude that this project is in conformance with the 1995 Medford District RMP and subsequent plan amendments that include

1. Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan Amendment for Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in Southwest Oregon, Coos Bay, Medford, and Roseburg Districts (2004)

2. Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998)

3. Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994)

4. ROD for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (1994)

5. Final SEIS for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2000), and the ROD and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001)

The ACS Consistency Review found that the project is in compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as originally developed under the NWFP.

This decision is also consistent with the Table Rocks Management Plan, the Endangered Species Act; Native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice; and Executive Order

13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply, and/or distribution.

B. Finding of No Significant Impact

I have considered the intensity of the impacts anticipated from the projects analyzed under Alternative 2 in the IVMP EA relative to each of the 10 areas suggested by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.

The BLM included PDFs in the proposed actions for the purpose of reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts that might otherwise stem from project implementation. There are no significant effects expected from project activities.

The following is a synopsis of the effects expected from implementation of activities analyzed under Alternative 2:

Oak woodland, shrubland, grassland, and meadow communities would be restored and rehabilitated through removal of encroaching conifers, reintroduction of fire, removal of nonnative plants, and planting with native plants. Thinning and prescribed burning would reduce stand density in dry forests and reduce the susceptibility to insect and disease epidemics by increasing individual tree resiliency (EA p. 47).

There is no expectation for the occurrence of effects to fisheries because of the project design and use of PDFs and BMPs. There would be no reduction in streamside shade and, therefore, no increase in water temperature. The potential for large, instream wood recruitment would not be reduced. Riparian reserves, slash, untreated areas, and canopy retention would prevent any changes to peak flows or water temperature, and prevent sediment from traveling off treated units due to the lack of hydrologic connectivity. These should prevent or minimize impacts to an inconsequential level (EA p. 81).

There are no known spotted owl sites in the project area and no spotted owl habitat will be treated; therefore, consultation is not needed. Likewise, there is no known presence of fisher in the project area and there is no fisher denning or resting habitat in the project area.

Overall, impacts on sensitive wildlife species would be minimal because PDFs would be implemented and the resultant high level of habitat variability would remain across the project area and surrounding landscape. The proposed actions, along with other future foreseeable projects expected to occur across the project area, are not expected to affect the long-term population viability of any species known to be in the area or lead to the need to list these species as Threatened or Endangered because only a small percentage of habitat would be treated and sufficient habitat would be retained throughout the District. Treatments would be separated spatially and temporally, precluding major effects to species habitats or disturbance during breeding seasons. Diversity would be retained across the landscape to provide habitat for species associated with early seral vegetation, as well as areas with mature forest to provide for quality dispersal habitat and refugia for species associated with late-successional forest (EA p. 96).

The BLM completed surveys for Special Status plants and will protect sites from direct and indirect effects through buffers or PDFs. Treatments would improve habitat for most Special Status species by making habitat more resilient to catastrophic events like wildfire.

Treatments that leave tops and limbs on the forest floor would temporarily increase surface fuel loadings and, therefore, potential fire severity *if not* accompanied by adequate fuels reduction. Fuel loadings after some treatments would temporarily increase in areas where biomass removal is not feasible. In the event of a wildfire, this would temporarily create higher rates of spread and greater flame lengths. Despite the temporary increase in ground fuels, recent research (Omi and Martinson 2002) indicates that a reduction in crown fuels outweighs any increase in surface fire hazard. This temporary increase in surface fuels is usually less than one year (EA pp. 114-115).

Proposed treatments would not contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the District because of the use of PDFs, and ongoing weed treatments (EA p. 107).

Project activities would alter the current trend of large-scale, high severity fire events by disrupting fuel continuity, uniformity, and structure. This would reduce potential fire behavior in strategic locations, promote effective suppression activities, and create more variable fire severity and intensity in the event of a wildfire (EA p. 118)

PDFs would prevent any direct and indirect effects to identified cultural resources (EA p. 124). Tribal consultation would reduce the potential for negative effects to tribally significant resources (EA pp. 126-127). Additionally, restoration treatments under the EA could result in a cumulative beneficial effect to archeological resources and culturally significant areas by reducing the likelihood of a high intensity wildfire (EA p. 127).

2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety.

The project has not been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety.

Potential for large-scale, high intensity fire would be reduced by strategically locating fuel treatment areas to create defensible space, making fire suppression more successful across the project area (EA pp. 114, 117).

Prescribed "burning would conform to the Oregon Smoke Management Program (OAR 629-048-0001 through 629-048-0500). All burning activities would comply with the national ambient air quality standards for particulates (PM 10 and PM 2.5)" (EA p. 116). Prescribed burning would produce smoke during implementation, but should result in reduced smoke emissions should a wildfire occur (EA p. 132).

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area.

The Medford District encompasses a variety of areas with unique characteristics. Site-specific PDFs tailored to the characteristics of the site and incorporated into project activities would preclude adverse effects to these areas. A variety of meadow habitats, savannahs, oak woodlands, and shrublands are in decline because of encroachment and lack of disturbance in the

project area. The project proposes to improve these habitats through thinning of encroaching vegetation and reintroduction of fire.

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

The effects of this project are similar to those of many other projects implemented within the scope of the RMP and NWFP. There is a continuing full range of debate, findings, and opinions about the potential effects of such land management activities. It underscores a level of uncertainty that exists in assessing the changes that may occur as a result of such projects. Any uncertainty in actual effects is acknowledged by the EISs (e.g., FEIS/PRMP pp. 4-7; 4-24; 4-73; 4-79; 4-98) to which the IVMP EA is tiered, and in the EA (pp. 131, 133) regarding climate change. 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)).

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

The analysis does not show that this action will involve any unique or unknown risks.

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

The action and the decision will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. While the programmatic approach is different from many projects, the EA authorizes projects that are similar to other projects designed to implement the RMP and NWFP.

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

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified. Since this is a programmatic EA, individual interdisciplinary teams would assess proposed projects in light of other projects in the area to assure that no significant cumulative effects would occur from implementation.

8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

The project area contains sites that are listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Site-specific protection measures (EA p. 34, PDFs) will be implemented for each project to prevent loss or destruction of any significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.

The Table Rocks Fuel Reduction and Vegetation Restoration project area is within the range of three federally endangered plants – Gentner's fritillary (*Fritillaria gentneri*), Cook's lomatium (*Lomatium cookii*), and Large flowered meadowfoam (*Limnanthes pumila* ssp. *grandiflora*).

Two years of surveys were conducted for these species, as directed in the programmatic consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service. No sites were discovered in the proposed units. Therefore, this project would have no effects to T&E plants.

There are no known spotted owl sites in the project area and no spotted owl habitat will be treated; therefore, consultation is for this species not needed. Likewise, there is no known presence of fisher in the project area and there is no fisher denning or resting habitat in the project area.

The project applies the Project Design Criteria of the Biological Opinion (Tails#13420-2011-F-0064) provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service for vernal pool fairy shrimp. The project will have a positive effect on the species since it will not enter vernal pools when the fairy shrimp are active and project activities will restore native plant communities.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.

There is no indication this project will result in actions that will threaten a violation of any environmental laws.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on information in the EA and comments received from the public, it is my determination that Alternative 2, the selected alternative, will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of effects addressed by the Environmental Impact Statements for the Medford District RMP (1995) and the NWFP or are otherwise not significant. Thus, the Integrated Vegetation Management Project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment and an 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) regarding context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA and on my understanding of the project. As noted above, the analysis of effects has been completed within the context of the Medford District RMP and it is consistent with that plan and the scope of effects anticipated from that plan. The analysis of effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of impacts.

12-17-14

Jeanne Klein
Acting Field Manager
Butte Falls Resource Area
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

Date