

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)  
DEER NORTH VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT  
DOI-BLM-OR-M070-2009-0010-EA**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Grants Pass Field Manager has made a preliminary decision to implement Alternative 3, with associated best management practices (BMPs) and project design features (PDFs). One modification to this preliminary decision is to implement the silvicultural prescription of density management/modified group selection for unit 7-11 rather than density management/understory removal. This prescription modification would not change the analysis and conclusion of effects as analyzed under the EA. Alternative 3 would be implemented under two or more decisions that include the Deer North Timber Sale as one decision and other density management treatments in separate decisions. The public will be notified of these separate decision documents. All proposed forest management activities were analyzed under the Deer North Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-OR-M070-2009-0010-EA).

Based on the context and intensity of the impacts analyzed in the EA (p. 20-132), I have determined that Alternative 3 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.

Alternative 3 would not have any significant effects beyond those described in the broader analyses conducted and disclosed in the environmental impact statements for the Medford District Resource Management Plan 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.

The Grants Pass Resource Area initiated planning and design for this project to conform and be consistent with the Medford District's 1995 RMP. Following the March 31, 2011 decision by the United States District Court for the District of Columbia in *Douglas Timber Operators et al. v. Salazar*, which vacated and remanded the administrative withdrawal of the Medford District's 2008 ROD and RMP, the BLM evaluated this project for consistency with both the 1995 RMP and the 2008 ROD and RMP. Based upon this review, Alternative 3 contains some design features not mentioned specifically in the 2008 ROD and RMP, such as 360' Riparian Reserve width for fish bearing streams. The 2008 ROD and RMP did not preclude use of these design features, and the use of these design features is clearly consistent with the goals and objectives in the 2008 ROD and RMP. Accordingly, this project is consistent with the Medford District's 1995 RMP and the 2008 ROD/RMP.

In making this finding, I considered the following criteria, suggested by the Council on Environmental Quality, for evaluating the intensity or severity of the impacts of the activities proposed in the Deer North Timber Sale.

**Context.** Alternative 3 includes site-specific actions directly involving approximately 205 acres through density management/ modified group selections and approximately 541 acres of DM/UR treatments. Road maintenance will occur on up to 32 miles of existing roads and 0.8 miles of temporary routes. All density management treatments will be treated by selective slashing, handpiling and/or underburning. These forest management treatments on BLM (Bureau of Land Management) administered land that by itself do not have international, national, region-wide, or state-wide importance. Alternative 3 is located within the Matrix land use allocation and within the boundaries of the Deer Creek Watershed.

The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended actions and is within the context of local importance. Chapter 3 of the EA details the effects of Alternative 3. None of the effects identified, including direct, indirect and cumulative effects, are considered to be significant and do not exceed those effects described in the Medford District Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (June 1995).

**Intensity.** The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27.

**1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.** The predicted environmental effects of Alternative 3, most noteworthy, include:

- a) **Soil and Water.** Within the Deer Creek 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed (as well as affected 6<sup>th</sup> field subwatersheds), actions proposed in this alternative would contribute to the cumulative watershed effects of:
  - Sediment to streams in small localized deposits for short term, 3 years; however, in the long term, sedimentation in stream would be less than the current condition. Added OHV trail development could cause additions of fine sediment to Draper Creek.
  - Soil productivity would be slightly reduced but would be maintained in a moderate range of compaction at 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> field levels.
  - The cumulative effects are within the scope of anticipated effects to water and soil determined in the 1995 RMP/EIS (pp. 4-14 to 4-24).
- b) **Productivity.** Alternative 3 includes 746 acres of commercial harvest representing 3% of the BLM lands in the Planning Area (0.1% of the watershed). None of the actions proposed under Alternative 3 would affect the long-term productivity of BLM lands in the Planning Area.
- c) **Fire hazard.** Treatments would reduce crown fire potential after post harvest slash treatments on approximately 746 acres of public land in the WUI. Overall, the Deer North project would decrease fire hazard on 746 acres under Alternative 3 with potentially producing forest products (biomass) from fuels treatment.
- d) **Fisheries.** Alternative 3 would not likely disrupt normal behavior patterns such as migration, spawning, egg incubation, rearing, and feeding because habitat would not be degraded. The habitat condition would not be expected to be different from what was described above under the No Action Alternative. Hydrologic analysis (Section 3.2) did not identify any impacts to channels which would result from harvest or fuel treatments, all of which would be outside of Riparian Reserves. Road maintenance and construction have the potential to cause small inputs of fine sediments to streams immediately downstream of culverts, but the size and effects on fish would be so greatly reduced by implementation of PDFs that these actions are not

likely to alter fish habitat. Salmonid survival and production would not be affected because, as stated in the Soil and Water section (3.2), there would be no alterations to channel form or channel processes. There would be no alteration to sedimentation processes which would create chronic adverse water quality or channel conditions.

e) **Botany.** See T &E plants in 9 below. The known sites of Bureau Sensitive and Survey and Manage species would be protected with a no disturbance buffer that would maintain the microhabitat (See PDFs in section 2.4). Thus Alternatives 2 and 3 would have no impact on these species and would not trend them toward listing.

There are three main reasons why potential weed establishment is not expected to result in a detectable effect to overall ecosystem health. First, surveys indicate that a very small percentage - less than 1% of acreage within the Planning Area units - are affected by noxious weeds. Second, these sites located in units proposed for treatment have been reported during predisturbance surveys, and have received weed treatment under Medford District's Integrated Weed Management Plan and Environmental Assessment OR-110-98-14 Third, Project Design Features (PDFs) have been established to minimize the rate at which project activities might potentially spread noxious weed seed from outside/adjacent sources.

f) **Northern spotted owl.** See 9 below

**2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.** The project has not been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. Dust created from vehicle traffic on gravel or natural-surfaced roads and logging operations would be localized and of short duration. As such, Alternative 3 is consistent with the provisions of the Federal Clean Air Act.

**3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** No known cultural sites are located within treatment units. There are no park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, or ecologically critical areas in Alternative 3. There are no developed recreation sites that would be affected by Alternative 3. The area is open to dispersed recreation use, as is most of the Grants Pass Resource Area. Alternative 3 would have a neutral effect on dispersed recreation in the Resource Area.

**4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects of Alternative 3 on the quality of the human environment are adequately understood by the interdisciplinary team to provide analysis for the decision. There are no highly controversial effects from Alternative 3. A complete disclosure of the predicted effects is contained in Chapter 3 of the EA. The effects of this project are similar to those of many other projects that are implemented within the scope of the RMP and Northwest Forest Plan. There is a continuing full range of debate, findings and opinions about the potential effects of such land management activities as evidenced by public comments received regarding this project. 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 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1998) (quoting Sierra Club v. U.S. Forest Service, 843 F.2d 1190, 1193 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1988)).

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The effects of Alternative 3 are not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience with forest management projects and have found the effects to be reasonably predictable. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment which are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Public scoping and comments received on the Deer North Vegetation Management Project EA did not identify 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.** Alternative 3 does not set a precedent for future actions that might have significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about future consideration. Alternative 3 would meet the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) to “Reduce both natural and activity based fuel hazards through methods such as prescribed burning, mechanical or manual manipulation of forest vegetation and debris, removal of forest vegetation and debris, and combinations of these methods” (p. 91). Any future projects would be evaluated through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and would stand on their own as to environmental effects.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The interdisciplinary team evaluated Alternative 3 in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects outside those already disclosed in the *Medford District Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (1995)* are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of Alternative 3 is contained in Chapter 3 of the EA.

**8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other 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.** A cultural survey was completed within the proposed ground disturbing activity locations for the Deer North Vegetation Management Project Area. Alternative 3 (including PDFs) would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would Alternative 3 cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

**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.**

- a) **Fish.** Southern Oregon/Northern California coho salmonid survival and production would not be affected because, as stated in the Soil and Water section (3.2), there would be no alterations to channel form or channel processes. There would be no alteration to sedimentation processes which would create chronic adverse water quality or channel conditions.
- b) **Plants.** The T&E species *Fritillaria gentneri* and *Lomatium cookii* were not observed during surveys in the Planning Area. Because these species do not occur in proposed project units, actions proposed in these alternatives would have no effect on *F. gentneri* or *L. cookii*.

Additionally there are no known sites of State Threatened botanical species in or adjacent to proposed project units, thus Alternatives 3 would have no impact on these species.

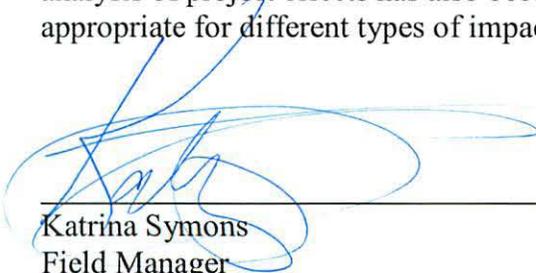
There are no populations of T&E, State Threatened Species, or Bureau Sensitive nonvascular plants in the proposed units.

- c) **Spotted owl.** Alternative 3 would not incrementally affect the stability of the northern spotted owl population in southwestern Oregon since the rate of habitat loss is substantially reduced, there is substantial in-growth of habitat, and newly identified threats are independent to Alternative 3.

**10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** Alternative 3 does not violate any known federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Furthermore, the Proposed Action is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs (EA, Chapter 1.6).

**Finding**

I have determined that Alternative 3, as modified, 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 the context and the intensity of the impacts 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's Resource Management Plan 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 impacts and the effects were determined to be insignificant.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Katrina Symons  
Field Manager  
Glendale/Grants Pass Resource Areas  
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

6/30/11  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date