

**Decision Record
for the
Fire Resiliency Project
As analyzed under the Revised Fire Resiliency Project Environmental Assessment
(DOI-BLM-OR-M080-2010-003-EA)**

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Glendale Resource Area, Medford District**

I. INTRODUCTION

This Decision Record documents the decision regarding forest management activities analyzed under the Revised Fire Resiliency Project Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-OR-M080-2010-003-EA). The Proposal analyzed under the Revised EA included approximately 468 acres of understory thinning, 432 acres of density management thinning, thinning in Riparian Reserves, biomass removal, treatment of activity slash, 17 miles of road maintenance, and 2.2 miles temporary route reconstruction/construction. Activity slash would be handpiled and burned, or lopped and scattered to reduce fire hazard.

The Planning Area is within the Lawson and Rattlesnake drainages within the Glendale Resource Area of the Medford District Bureau of Land Management. The Lawson Creek area is located approximately five miles northeast of the town of Glendale, Oregon in Township 32 South, Range 6 West Sections 1, 11. The Rattlesnake Creek area is located three miles southwest of Glendale in Township 33 South, Range 6 West, Sections 6, 7, 18; and Township 33 South, Range 7 West, Sections 1, 11.

II. REVISIONS TO ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Revised Fire Resiliency Project EA replaces and supersedes the original Fire Resiliency Project EA (DOI-BLM-OR-M080-2010-003-EA) previously released on April 8, 2011. The following are changes to the original EA in consideration of public comments and internal review:

1. Corrects units 11-3L and 11-4L in EA (p. 16) to read units 1-3L and 1-4L in Revised EA (p. 17). This revision is in response to public comment.
2. Project Design Feature (2.2. Wildlife) language for the northern spotted owl was clarified to read, "Buffer distance for prescribed fire may be reduced if substantial smoke from prescribed fire would not enter the nest stand March 1 – June 30. The restricted area is calculated as a radius from the assumed nest site (point)."
3. Appendix 2 (pp. 115,116) has been revised to add a discussion of flying squirrels as a prey species for the northern spotted owl. This revision is in response to public comment.

4. A glossary has been added at the end of the document to clarify usage of terms in the document.
5. Appendix 11 (BLM Response to Public Comments) was added and specifically responds to the comments from the three e-mail comment letters received during the comment period.
6. Minor typographical and errata errors were corrected.

These modifications are minor and do not change the scope of the project analyzed, nor do the modifications affect the adequacy of the analysis contained in the EA.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Glendale Resource Area informed the public in its first public letter that “public collaboration would take place with members of the local communities and any other interested stakeholders to identify and address any site-specific concerns.” The first public meeting for the proposed Fire Resiliency Project was held on June 12, 2010 at the Community Center in Wolf Creek. Residents of Wolf Creek, Glendale, Sunny Valley and Azalea were invited by individual letters and through a four page project notification inserted in the local Big News newsletter. Two subsequent public meetings were held at community buildings in Wolf Creek and Glendale. Other interested parties, outside of these communities, were also notified; federal, state and county agencies; Native American tribes; and private organizations. Two field trips were provided by the BLM in conjunction with these meetings to review past forest management practices in the surrounding area. The BLM also made presentations of the Fire Resiliency Project to the Josephine County Stewardship Committee and the Josephine County Fuels Committee.

A Project Scoping Report for the proposed Fire Resiliency Project was mailed to individuals desiring to participate or comment on the project. The original BLM Proposal was to treat up to 10,000 acres Resource Area wide. The BLM was invited to a local meeting on December 3, 2010 conducted by the King Mountain Advocates (KMA) group in Wolf Creek to discuss KMA’s Neighbor’s Alternative.

After further discussions with the public, the BLM decided that the Fire Resiliency Project would be accomplished in two steps. The first step would be to analyze approximately 900 acres within the Cow Creek watershed under the first EA. Collaboration for the remaining 9,100 acres, that include acres within KMA’s boundary of interest, would begin after public review of the initial 900 acres of treatment. The remaining 9,100 acres would be analyzed in a separate environmental document.

The Fire Resiliency Project Environmental Assessment (EA) was made available for public comment from April 8 to May 9, 2011. The BLM received 3 comment letters or emails to the Fire Resiliency Project EA. BLM responses to public comments are found in Appendix 11 of the Revised Fire Resiliency Project Environmental Assessment and were considered in reaching a final decision for treatments in the Fire Resiliency Project Planning Area.

IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Medford BLM received a Letter of Concurrence (July 2010 NLAA LOC TAILS# 13420-2010-I-0178) stating proposed treatments “may affect, and is not likely to adversely affect the spotted owl and spotted owl critical habitat.” Although the Selected Alternative does not occur in any Revised (2008) Critical Habitat Units, the same effects would also apply to spotted owls and the primary constituent elements of critical habitat in the (1992) CHU OR-64. The proposed Fire Resiliency Project Planning Area does not occur in marbled murrelet critical habitat.

Consultation for the Endangered Species Act with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is not needed as the Selected Alternative will not affect listed fish species or their habitat. No consultation is needed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as there is no adverse effect to Essential Fish Habitat for coho and chinook within the Umpqua Basin.

Fire Resiliency Project Scoping Reports were sent to local federally recognized Native American Tribes interested in Medford District Bureau of Land Management proposed projects. The Tribes take an active role in the management of their native lands and the BLM works with individual tribal governments to further identify and address Native American concerns and traditional uses of lands administered by the BLM. Follow-up phone calls to Tribes did not identify cultural resource concerns for the proposed project.

V. DECISION

Based on site-specific analysis, the supporting project record, management recommendations contained in the Middle Cow Creek Watershed Analysis (1999) as well as the management direction contained in the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines of the Northwest Forest Plan (1994), Medford District Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (1995), Evaluation of the Medford Resource Management Plan Relative to Four Northern Spotted Owl Reports (2005), and public comments, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 (with modifications) referred to hereafter as the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative includes treating approximately 468 acres through understory thinning and approximately 432 acres through density management. The actual acres treated will be less than analyzed due to red tree vole buffers, Recovery Action 32 stands, on the ground riparian reserve layout, and Deferred Timber Management Areas as identified under the 2008 Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (ROD and RMP). These untreated areas will provide variability across the landscape and within individual treatment stands. The Selected Alternative includes all project Design Features and Best Management Practices described in the EA in Section 2.3. The specific forest management activities include the following.

Understory thinning treatments will reduce the amount of ladder fuels that could carry fire from the forest floor into the crowns of the trees. Understory thinning would occur across Matrix lands as well as associated Riparian Reserves. However, there will be no removal of wood products from within Riparian Reserves. Thinning of understory vegetation (brush and small trees) would generally be limited to material less than eight inches diameter at breast height

(DBH). Vegetation up to twelve inches DBH would be cut in two units (1-3R and parts of 1-1L) on Matrix lands..

In an effort to reduce hardwood stump sprouting, selected dominant hardwood stems would be retained. Conifer trees will be included in the spacing prescription. The spacing between conifer trees would range between 14 and 20 feet. This range of spacing would allow incorporation of existing stand characteristics (e.g. tree size, distribution, species present) into the treatment design so that land use allocation objectives in addition to fuels management objectives could be met. For hazard fuels reduction, a 25 foot No Treatment Zone would be applied from the stream bankfull width (by slope distance) along streams, and perennial springs and seeps to protect water quality stream channel structure and water quality.

Density Management Thinning of commercial sized trees will occur on approximately 432 acres of Matrix lands. Approximately three acres in unit 6-1R will be deferred as it is within a Deferred Timber Management Area. There will be no logging within Riparian Reserves due to logging and economic feasibility. Density management thinning will reduce the probability of fire spreading from the crown of one tree to the next. To achieve this objective, density management thinning would focus on trees greater than eight inches DBH. Larger trees would generally be selected for retention, as they tend to be more fire resilient due to their thicker bark and higher crowns. Density management thinning will maintain and promote vigor of the remaining trees. Growth rates will be maintained or would increase on retained trees. To reduce stump sprouting, selected dominant hardwood stems would be retained. Understory thinning treatments that reduced ladder fuels and fuel loading would be done in conjunction with density management thinning in most of the treatment units.

Density management thinning would be designed to meet the objectives of reducing the fire hazard while maintaining fish and wildlife habitat by retaining a minimum:

- 60% canopy cover or greater in nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat (NRF) of Northern Spotted Owl habitat.
- 40% canopy cover or greater in dispersal Spotted Owl habitat.

Activity Slash created from thinning will be lopped and scattered, chipped on site and/or removed, or handpiled and burned to reduce the fire hazard. Treatment selection would, depend on the amount slash and its distribution within a unit.

Low intensity underburns may occur within 7 years of initial project implementation to reduce fuel loading, ladder fuels and reduce sprouting hardwoods and/or other brush vegetation.

Biomass Removal will be accomplished through whole-tree yarding or yarding with attached tops to reduce ground disturbance and fuel loading. The whole tree harvest method would facilitate biomass removal to existing roads and landings.

Road Work included approximately 2.2 miles of temporary spur route construction under Alternative 2 of the Fire Resiliency EA. After further specialist field review, it was determined that approximately one mile of temporary spur route construction will be needed. The reasons

for the reduction are that units 11-1L and 1-3L in the Lawson area can be accessed through existing routes and due to economic feasibility, approximately 0.5 miles of temporary route construction would not occur in the Rattlesnake area. Temporary route construction would generally occur on ridgetops and less than 35% grade and will not require cut and fill or full bench construction.

There will be no new road construction, skid routes, landings or staging areas on fragile gradient restricted (FGR) soils. Temporary spur routes are not intended to be part of the permanent or designated transportation network system and would be decommissioned after use. Temporary spur routes would be returned as close as possible to pre-treatment conditions by ripping, mulching, and seeding. Temporary spur routes would be barricaded after use. No construction of permanent roads would occur under the Selected Alternative.

Road maintenance would occur as needed on approximately 17 miles of existing road. Road maintenance activities would occur on existing roads to keep the road at its original design standard. Work would include road blading and reshaping, spot rocking and surface replacement, ditch cleaning, culvert inlet and outlet cleaning, culvert replacement, and removing vegetation along roadsides to improve site distance.

Harvesting on Fragile Gradient Restricted Soils (units 11-1L, 1-3L, and 1-4L). Harvesting will be done by cable systems on slope gradients less than 70% and minimize the number and widths of logging corridors. The following project design features are identified in the Revised EA.

- All logging operations would be limited to the dry season (May 15-Oct 15).
- Units would be yarded using full or partial suspension.
- Hand waterbars would be constructed within cable corridors on these units immediately following use on slopes in excess of 65%, and in areas where bare soil occurs on slopes under 65%.
- Activity slash would be placed on bare soils within yarding corridors and below landing sites.
- Landing locations would not be placed on slopes over 70% or directly above draws

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The alternatives considered in detail included the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1), which serves as the baseline to compare effects and Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative. See Appendix 1 “Alternative Development Summary” in the Revised EA for alternatives considered but not eliminated from further study.

DECISION RATIONALE

The Decision Factors used to make my decision were identified in the Revised EA to

- Provide for reduced fire behavior, restore, maintain, and enhance fire adapted ecosystems, and promote fire resiliency.

- Provide for strategic placement of treatments (ridgeline, ingress and egress) for fire suppression activities to protect public and firefighter safety and roadways and major travel routes, because they provide access for fire suppression equipment as well as evacuation routes for the general public.
- Provide for social and economic benefits to local communities.

My rationale for the decision is as follows:

1 The Selected Alternative (modified Alternative 2) addresses the purpose and need of the Revised EA to a) improve forest health by creating fire resilient forests; b) provide economic benefits and; c) reduce the fire hazard within the Planning Area protecting values at risk of loss from wildfire.

2. Alternative 1 was not selected because this alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project as described in Chapter 1 of the EA.

3. As mentioned in “Public Involvement” above, public collaboration and public comments were used in making my decision.

- After further discussions with the public, the BLM decided that the Fire Resiliency Project would be accomplished in two steps. .
- BLM responses to public comments are found in Appendix 11 of the Revised Fire Resiliency Project Environmental Assessment and were considered in reaching a final decision for treatments in the Fire Resiliency Project Planning Area.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued as a separate document. After review of minor changes to the Fire Resiliency EA, I have determined that the Revised Fire Resiliency 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.

VI. PLAN CONFORMANCE

This decision conforms with the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (Northwest Forest Plan FSEIS, 1994 and ROD, 1994); the *Final-Medford District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision* (EIS, 1994 and RMP/ROD, 1995); the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement: Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in Southwest Oregon* (FSEIS, 2004 and ROD, 2004); the *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (FSEIS, 2000 and ROD, 2001).

The Glendale 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, we evaluated this project for consistency with both the 1995 RMP and the 2008 ROD and RMP. Based upon this review, the Selected Alternative contains some design features not mentioned specifically in the 2008 ROD and RMP. 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.

VII ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

This decision is a forest management decision. Administrative remedies are available to persons who believe they will be adversely affected by this decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR § 5003.

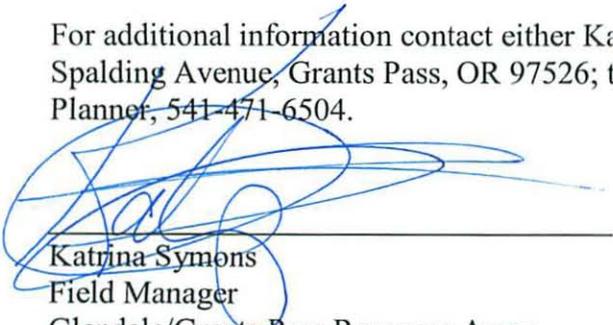
To protest a forest management decision, a person must submit a written and signed protest to the Glendale Field Manager, 2164 NE Spalding Avenue, Grants Pass, OR 97526 by the close of business (4:30 p.m.) not more than 15 days after publication of the Notice of Decision. The protest must clearly and concisely state which portion or element of the decision is being protested and why it is believed to be in error, as well as cite applicable regulations. Faxed or emailed protests will not be considered.

VIII IMPLEMENTATION DATE

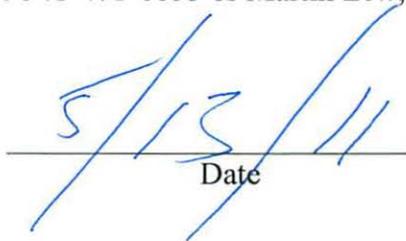
If no protest is received by the close of business (4:30 p.m.) within 15 days after publication of the Notice of Decision, the decision will become final. If a timely protest is received, the decision will be reconsidered in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available, and a final decision will be issued in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3

IX CONTACT PERSON

For additional information contact either Katrina Symons, Glendale Field Manager, 2164 NE Spalding Avenue, Grants Pass, OR 97526; telephone 541-471-6653 or Martin Lew, Ecosystem Planner, 541-471-6504.



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



Date