

*Alternative Access to Unit 5
of
Treetop Flyer Commercial Thinning*

Bureau of Land Management
Roseburg District Office
South River Field Office
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U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
Roseburg District Office
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Roseburg, Oregon 97471

This environmental assessment analyzes proposed road construction designed in conformance with management direction provided in the 1995 Roseburg Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP), as amended prior to December 30, 2008.

The BLM is providing a 30-day period for public review and comment on the documents, and will accept comments until the close of business (4:30 PM, PST) on January 14, 2010.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. If you choose to submit any written comments, they should be directed to Ralph Thomas, South River Field Manager, at the above address.

In keeping with Bureau of Land Management policy, the Roseburg District posts Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Statements, Findings of No Significant Impact, and Decision Records/Documentations on the district web page under **Plans & Projects** at www.blm.gov/or/districts/roseburg, on the same day in which legal notices of availability for public review and notices of decision are published in *The News-Review*, Roseburg, Oregon. Individuals desiring a paper copy of such documents will be provided one upon request. Individuals able to access these documents on-line are encouraged to do so, as internet use reduces paper consumption and administrative costs associated with copying and mailing.

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Chapter One

Purpose and Need for Action

This chapter provides a description of the purpose and need for the proposed action.

I. Background

Treetop Flyer Commercial Thinning is a timber sale analyzed in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (EA # OR-105-08-02), as part of the Proposed Action. The South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA was released for public comment on July 8, 2008.

Unit 5 of the Treetop Flyer Commercial Thinning project is identified as Unit 30-3-15A in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (Table 2-2, p. 8). The unit, identified as 138 acres in area, was proposed for a combination of ground-based, cable and helicopter yarding. Construction of a full-bench and end-haul extension of BLM Road No. 30-3-15.1 was proposed. This extension, over one-third of a mile in length, would provide access for cable yarding portions of the stand between Roads 30-3-15.1 and 30-3-34.1. The remaining 35 acres of the unit located up-slope from Road 30-3-15.1 was to be helicopter yarded. Given the value of the timber to be thinned, recent declines in log prices, and the high cost of helicopter yarding, alternative access is being sought to allow the thinning of the 35 acres upslope of Road 30-3-15.1 that would not be viable as originally planned.

II. The Proposed Action

The proposed action is construction of a permanent all-weather road (No. 30-3-15.3) from the junction of Roads Nos. 30-3-15.2, 30-3-15.1 and 30-3-22.0 to the ridgeline above. Upon reaching the ridgeline, the road would follow the ridge through a ten-year-old plantation, before passing through a thin strip of young timber and ending at a landing area in a clearing.

III. Objectives

The objectives of the proposed road construction are to:

- Provide access for commercial thinning of approximately 35 acres originally planned for helicopter yarding, consistent with the objectives described in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 3),
- Facilitate uphill yarding to provide for safer yarding operations, and better log control that would greatly reduce the potential for damage to the residual stand if the area were yarded downhill to Road 30-3-15.1,
- Extend the season of operability for thinning operations,
- Providing better access for future stand management, and
- Reduce the amount of “full-bench and end-haul” road construction, and eliminate the need to decommission the temporary full-bench road.

IV. Decision Factors

- The degree to which the objectives previously described would be achieved,
- The nature and intensity of environmental impacts that would result from implementing the proposed action, and the nature and effectiveness of measures to minimize impacts to resources, and
- Compliance with applicable laws including, but not limited to the Endangered Species Act; Clean Water Act and O&C Act.

V. Conformance

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the environmental consequences of both the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives, to explain the environmental effects of each and provide information necessary for the authorized officer to render a decision.

Additional information and analyses provided by the following documents are incorporated by reference.

- The *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (USDA and USDI 1994a),
- The Roseburg District *Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (USDI BLM 1994 (PRMP/EIS)),
- The *Final Supplement to the 2004 Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (USDA and USDI 2007a).
- The *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revision of the Resource Management Plans for the Western Oregon Bureau of Land Management* (USDI BLM 2008 (2008 FEIS))

Analysis in this environmental assessment conforms to management direction from the Roseburg District *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP (USDI, BLM 1995a)), as amended by the following:

- The *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (USDA and USDI 1994b).
- The *Record of Decision to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (USDA and USDI 2007b).

Chapter Two

Discussion of the Alternatives

This chapter describes the basic features of the alternatives being analyzed.

I. Alternative One - No Action

Under this alternative, the proposed permanent road would not be constructed. As proposed in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA, access would be provided by renovating 4,080 of Road No. 30-3-15.1, which is a mid-slope road and constructing a temporary surfaced extension approximately 2,175 feet in length, also mid-slope, requiring full-bench construction and end-haul, and removal of approximately three acres of timber. Upon completion of thinning, the road would be decommissioned. The 35 acres located upslope of the road would be excluded from the unit and would not be thinned.

II. Alternative Two – The Proposed Action

Under this alternative, the BLM would construct Road No. 30-3-15.3 as a surfaced all-weather road to provide year around access for cable-yarding, including the 35 acres that would not be accessible under Alternative One.

The road would generally have a 16-foot subgrade and a 12-foot running surface, with widening for curves and switchbacks. The road would be surfaced with 12 inches of crushed aggregate. Approximately 910 feet of the road, extending from Sta. 1+70 to 10+80, would be full-bench construction. Clearing limits for this segment of road would average approximately 60-feet and involve the removal of approximately 1.5 acres of timber. All excavated waste material and grubbed stumps would be end-hauled to a designated disposal site north of the junction of the new road with the existing roads. Exposed road cuts and the waste area material would be seeded and hydro-mulched to prevent erosion.

At Sta. 11+20, the road would reach the ridge and proceed along an existing jeep road, ending at Sta. 37+58. Construction of this segment would require some minor cut and fill. After passing through the previously harvested area described in Chapter One, it would pass through a strip of young timber approximately 100-feet in width, necessitating removal of a few small trees.

III. Resources not Present or Unaffected by the Alternatives

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, prime or unique farmlands, floodplains, wilderness, solid or hazardous waste; and Wild and Scenic Rivers are not present in the project area and would not be affected by either of the alternatives

The proposed action would be consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice in minority and low-income populations. The BLM has not identified any potential impacts to low-income or minority populations, either internally or through the public involvement process, arising from this type of activity. Employment associated with the road construction would involve local contractors who engage in similar types of work throughout Douglas County.

No Native American religious concerns have been identified by the South River Field Office through correspondence with local tribal governments.

Cultural/historical inventories of the location of the proposed road were conducted in 1995 in conjunction with the Kernel John timber sale and documented in survey report #SD9603. No cultural or historical resources were discovered, and a “No Effect” concurrence was received from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, dated June 25, 1996.

Botanical surveys of the project area, including the location of the proposed road construction, have been previously conducted. No special status botanical species were located which would be affected.

There would be no anticipated effect on the introduction or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive plants. Project design features described in Chapter Two of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 19) are intended to minimize the risk of introducing weeds. Ongoing control measures described in Chapter Three of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 39) are intended to control the spread of, or eliminate existing weed infestations. As a consequence negligible changes in noxious weed populations would be expected under either alternative, and no further discussion is necessary in this analysis.

IV. Issues Considered but not Analyzed in Detail

No issues for analysis were identified with respect to **Fisheries, Aquatic Habitat and Water Resources** for the following reasons.

- The project area is described in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA. There are no additional coho bearing streams, streams designated as critical habitat for coho salmon, or streams designated as Essential Fish Habitat for coho and chinook salmon beyond those already identified.
- The proposed road does not cross any intermittent or fish-bearing streams or pass through any Riparian Reserves, so there would be no potential for affecting in-stream aquatic habitat.
- The proposed road would be disconnected from the drainage network and would not have the potential for contributing sediment to streams or affecting stream flows.
- The same primary collector roads would be used for hauling timber, and the effects between the alternatives would not differ from those analyzed in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA.
- The effects of thinning with cable-yarding systems are also described in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA, and would not differ between the alternatives.

No issues for analysis were identified with respect to **Soils** for the following reason.

There are no specific soil concerns and measures identified in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA with respect to road construction, slope stability, and erosion would be applied under either alternative to address any general issues.

Chapter Three

Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

This chapter summarizes current conditions of specific resources present or potentially present in the project areas that could be affected by the proposed road construction. It also discusses specific resource values that may be affected and the nature of short-term and long-term effects that may ensue, including those that are direct, indirect and cumulative.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) provided guidance as to the extent to which agencies of the Federal government are required to analyze the environmental effects of past actions when describing the cumulative environmental effect of a proposed action in accordance with Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). CEQ noted the “[e]nvironmental analysis required under NEPA is forward-looking,” and “[r]eview of past actions is only required to the extent that this review informs agency decisionmaking regarding the proposed action.” This is because a description of the current state of the environment inherently includes effects of past actions. The guidance further states that “[g]enerally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historic details of individual past actions.”

The cumulative effects of the BLM timber management program as a whole in western Oregon have been described and analyzed in the Roseburg District PRMP/EIS and the FSEIS for the Northwest Forest Plan, incorporated herein by reference. The cumulative effects of road construction and the commercial thinning to which the proposed action is related have been described in Chapter Four of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (pp. 40-75).

I. Timber Resources

A. Affected Environment

As described in Chapter Three of South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 19), the BLM administers approximately 33,309 acres of late-seral forest lands in all land use allocations representing 58 percent of BLM-managed forest lands and 86.5 percent of all late-seral forest in the watershed. The harvest plan proposed 236 acres of regeneration harvest representing approximately 0.7 percent of all late-seral forest managed by the BLM in the watershed. The removal of 1.5 acres of mature and late-seral forest associated with construction of the proposed road would represent a negligible change in the remaining acres of late-seral forest.

The proposed road, described in Alternative Two, would originate in a 17 acre forest stand that is approximately 140 years old, with remnant components estimated at 230 years of age. As described on page 3, the road would exit this stand at Sta. 10+80 before reaching the ridgeline and passing through a plantation approximately ten years of age. It would exit the plantation and pass through a 40-year-old stand for a distance of approximately 100 feet before entering Unit 30-3-15A.

The forest stand comprising Unit 30-3-15A is 57 years of age with an average stocking of approximately 280 trees per acre. The relative density of the stand is 63 and canopy cover is 100 percent.

A map illustrating the locations of the road to be constructed under Alternative One, the road proposed by Alternative Two, and the respective areas that would be accessible for thinning is found in at page 8.

B. Alternative One – Effects of No Action

Under this alternative, the road proposed in Alternative Two would not be constructed. Access would, instead, be provided by the construction of a mid-slope extension of Road No. 30-3-15.1, as described on page 3. This full-bench construction would require clearing of an estimated three acres of right-of-way.

Portions of Unit 30-3-15A located down-slope from the road would be thinned in the manner described in Chapter Two of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (pp. 8-10). The upland portions of the stand would be principally thinned from below by removing trees from the suppressed and intermediate canopy classes, and retaining the healthiest, best-formed trees. Outside of “no-harvest” buffers, Riparian Reserves would be thinned using a variable density prescription.

The portion of the stand above this road, approximately 35 acres in area, would remain unthinned. As described in Chapter Four of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 41), the stand would continue to develop as a relatively homogeneous and even-aged stand, primarily single-storied and dominated by Douglas-fir. The forest canopy would remain fully closed and tree diameter growth and crown expansion would continue to decline from competition among trees for water, nutrients, and sunlight.

The percentage of live crown in individual trees would recede below 30 percent over the next 10 to 20 years, as lower limbs are shaded out and die. Suppression mortality and potential stagnation of tree growth would increase. As diameter growth rates decline, trees would become less capable of adapting to, and surviving disturbances, such as wind, wildfire, insects and diseases.

This would not meet the objectives of managing the stand for a high level of quality wood and sustainable timber production, maintain stand health and vigor; and recover the commodity value of trees that would be lost to suppression mortality.

C. Alternative Two – Effects of the Proposed Action

Under this alternative, the proposed surfaced permanent road would be constructed to the ridge top, providing all-weather access for cable-yarding all of Unit 30-3-15A. Construction of the road would necessitate the clearing of an estimated 1.5 acres of timber for the right-of-way, most of which would be associated with the initial 1,080 feet of construction through the late-seral stand described on page 5.

The entire unit would be cable-yarded in a manner consistent with that described in the manner described in Chapter Two of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (pp. 8-10).

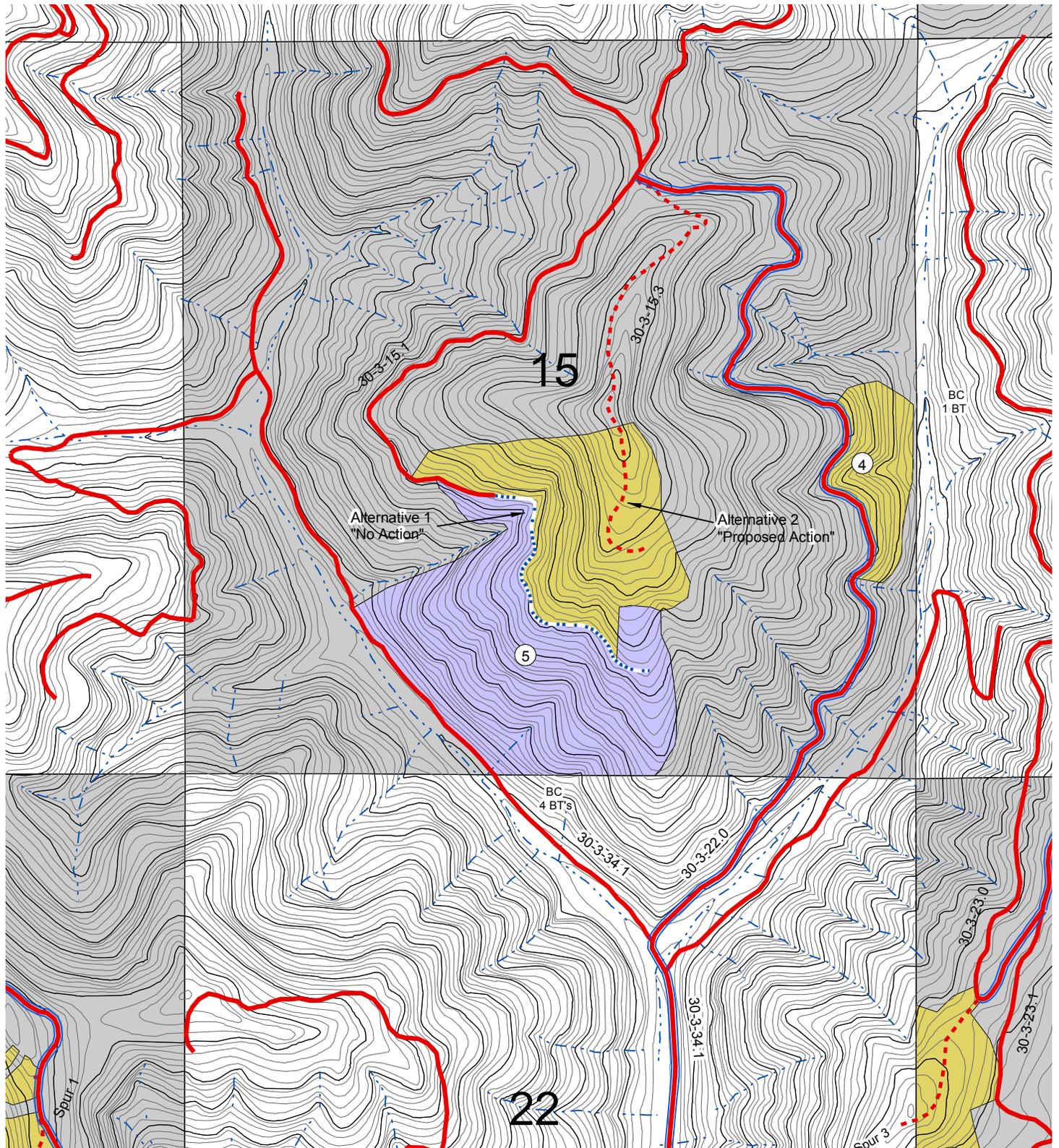
This alternative would meet the objectives described on page 1 of this environmental assessment, as well as the objectives identified in Chapter One of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 3) by facilitating treatment of the entire stand.

As discussed in Chapter Four of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 44), commercial thinning would assure high levels of timber productivity and quality wood production by increasing average stand diameter growth over the next 15 to 20 years, until forest canopies approach closure again. Selection of the best formed co-dominant and dominant trees for retention, and promoting live crown expansion and diameter growth by releasing these trees from competition would aid in maintenance of stand health and vigor, and increase resistance to disturbances such as wind, disease, insect attack, and wildfire.

Cumulatively, the effects of thinning the 35 acres, as originally planned, is consistent with the analysis found in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment. Thinning from below, principally removing trees from the suppressed and intermediate canopy classes does not change age-class distribution, and hence the abundance of mid-seral forest stands on BLM-administered lands in the watershed.

ALTERNATIVE ACCESS TO TREETOP FLYER UNIT 5

Commercial Thinning



T30S, R3W

Willamette Meridian, Douglas Co., OR.

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of this data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification.



- Existing Road
- Original Planned Construction
- Proposed Alternative Construction
- Stream
- 20 ft. Contour
- 100 ft. Contour

- Acres Accessible Under Alternative 1
- Additional Planned Acres Accessible Under Alternative 2
- BLM (O&C) Land
- Non-BLM Land

II. Wildlife

A. Affected Environment

A description of the wildlife species of concern that are considered likely to inhabit the project area and the types of habitat they occupy and utilize is provided in Chapter Three of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (pp. 22-29).

The location of the road construction proposed by Alternative Two of this environmental assessment is within the St. Johns Creek northern spotted owl home range, but outside of the core area, as depicted in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (Appendix B, Figure B-4). Annual surveys identified an owl pair in the home range in 2008 and 2009, but they did not nest and produce young. Occupation by a single owl was documented the previous three years. No successful reproduction and fledging has been documented since 2004.

At present, 194 acres or 39 percent of the half-mile radius core area is suitable habitat. In the 1.3-mile radius home range, 964 acres or 29 percent is suitable habitat. These figures are below the 50 percent core area and 40 percent home range viability thresholds for a reproductive owl pair ("50/40 threshold", USDI, USFWS 2008).

B. Alternative One – Effects of No Action

Under this alternative, the effects to wildlife from building the mid-slope extension to Road No. 30-3-15.1 would be consistent with those for Alternative Two described in Chapter Four of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (pp. 48-58). Construction of the mid-slope extension of Road No. 30-3-15.1 would remove approximately three acres of dispersal habitat.

For species such as the northern spotted owl, and other wildlife that depend on high levels of canopy closure, use of the thinned portion of the stand may decline over the next 15-20 years until canopy cover returns to pre-treatment levels. Thinning would also enhance forest health and vigor, and accelerate growth and development of characteristics that may provide suitable late-successional habitat in the future.

With respect to the 35 acres of the stand that would not be thinned, effects would be similar to those of Alternative One described in Chapter Four of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment (p. 46). Overstocked conditions would result in relatively slow growth rates that would prolong crown differentiation.

Eventually some trees would become dominant and shade out suppressed trees. Suppressed trees would die and stand as small-diameter snags until they ultimately fall, but because of their smaller size, they would not create openings as are found in late-seral stands. Crowns of adjoining dominant trees would soon expand into the newly-available growing space, limiting establishment of understory vegetation in response to the disturbance.

Multiple waves of such competition mortality would be necessary before dominant tree density would be low enough for understory reinitiation. This growth trajectory would not provide quality dispersal habitat for northern spotted owls in the near-term. It would also be unfavorable to the development of mature and late-successional forest attributes, particularly large-diameter trees, high crown volume, large branches, cavities, large snags, and large down wood that would provide suitable habitat for northern spotted owls and other species dependent on late-successional forest habitat.

C. Alternative Two – Effects of the Proposed Action

The proposed road construction would remove approximately 1.5 acres of suitable spotted owl habitat from a small isolated forest stand located near the outer periphery of the St. Johns Creek home range. The percentage of suitable habitat within the core area would remain unchanged at 39 percent. The 29 percent suitable habitat in the entire home range would decline by 0.16 percent.

There would be no direct effects to northern spotted owls because the project area is over one mile from the established nest patch of this owl pair, well beyond the 65-yard threshold for disruption. No habitat would be removed from within the half-mile radius core area.

The owl pair presently occupying the home range would be indirectly affected by the removal of 1.5 acres of suitable habitat from within the home range. While it appears likely that owls will continue to occupy the range, based on past survey results, reproductive success would likely remain compromised by present habitat conditions.

As described in the effects of No Action, thinning of the additional 35 acres that would become accessible by construction of the proposed road would likely reduce utilization by northern spotted owls over the next 15-20 years until canopy cover returns to pre-treatment levels. Thinning would enhance stand health and vigor, though, and accelerate growth and development that may provide suitable late-successional habitat in the future.

Slopes along the initial 900 to 1,000 feet are steep to very steep, similar to slope gradients along the route of the mid-slope extension described in Alternative One. Approximately 60 feet of the road crosses a swale/convex slope with a layer of granitic soils overlaying the weathered metamorphic rock below. The soils along this segment of the proposed road are moderately stable, as evidenced by the undulating terrain and some pistol butted trees.

V. Monitoring

Monitoring of the effects of the proposed action, if implemented, would be done in accordance with provisions contained in the ROD/RMP, Appendix I (p. 84-86, 193, and 195-199), focusing on the effects of timber harvest on: Matrix; Water and Soils; Wildlife Habitat; Fish Habitat; and Special Status Species Habitat.

Chapter Four

List of Agencies and Individuals Contacted; Preparers; and Literature Cited

A notice of initiation of the analysis was published in the Spring 2009 Quarterly Planning Update. Upon completion and release of the EA, a Notice of Availability for public review and comment will be published in *The News-Review*, Roseburg, Oregon.

I. Agencies & Persons Contacted:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

II. Agencies, organizations, and individuals to be notified of the completion of the EA:

Cascadia Wildlands Project
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Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
National Marine Fisheries Service
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Wild
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Umpqua Valley Audubon Society
Umpqua Watersheds, Inc.
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IV. Literature and References Cited

USDA/Forest Service and USDI/Bureau of Land Management. 1994a. 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.

USDA/Forest Service and USDI/BLM. 1994b. The Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl.

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USDI/Fish and Wildlife Service, USDI/Bureau of Land Management, and USDA/Forest Service. 2008. Methodology for estimating the number of northern spotted owls affected by proposed federal actions. Version 2.0. Oregon Fish and Wildlife Office, Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, OR.