

# Calapooya Creek Harvest Plan

NEPA #: DOI-BLM-OR-R040-2013-0009-EA

## Finding of No Significant Impacts

Swiftwater Field Office  
Roseburg District BLM

### Overview

The Roseburg District initiated planning and design for the Calapooya Creek Harvest Plan on May 3, 2013. The project conforms to and is consistent with the Roseburg District's 1995 Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP 1995). Analysis of the effects of the proposed actions tiers to the analytical assumptions and conclusions of the 1994 *Final - Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* ((PRMP/EIS) USDI/BLM 1994). Analysis of effects and information from the 2008 *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revision of the Resource Management Plans of the Western Oregon Bureau of Land Management* is incorporated by reference.

The Calapooya Creek Harvest Plan Environmental Analysis (EA) considered a No Action Alternative and one Proposed Action Alternative. As described in the EA (p. 12), the Action Alternative proposes treatment of 1,245 acres of mid-seral stands with Variable Density Thinning (VDT) and Variable Retention Harvest (VRH).

The action alternative proposes implementation of VDT in 24 units (1,147 acres) on approximately 421 acres within General Forest Management Area (GFMA), 274 acres within Connectivity/Diversity (C/D), and 452 acres of associated Riparian Reserve. Variable Retention Harvest would be implemented in two units (98 acres) with the dispersed retention prescription applied on 63 acres of GFMA and VDT applied to 35 acres of associated Riparian Reserves. Approximately 206 acres of the Calapooya Creek project are within northern spotted owl critical habitat, including 122 acres that would be treated with VDT and 84 acres, within one unit, that would be treated with VRH.

The location of prospective units and land use allocations are illustrated in Table 2 in the EA (p. 13-14).

Both context and intensity must be considered in determining significance of the environmental effects of an agency action (40 CFR 1508.27):

### Context

The analysis area is within the Calapooya Creek, Elk Creek and Lower North Umpqua fifth-field watersheds. Eighty-eight percent of the project area is within the Calapooya Creek watershed which drains approximately 157,194 acres, of which 11,661 acres (7.4 percent) are administered by the Swiftwater Field Office of the Roseburg District. The remainder of the project area is evenly divided between the Elk Creek and Lower North Umpqua River watersheds (EA p. 1).

Variable density thinning of 1,182 acres under the proposed action alternative would affect 0.7 percent of all lands and slightly less than 10 percent of the BLM administered lands in the Calapooya Creek watershed. A very small percentage of lands in the Elk Creek and Lower North Umpqua River watersheds would be affected by thinning in the Calapooya Creek project. Approximately 63 acres of mid-seral forest representing 0.6 percent of BLM administered lands in the Calapooya Creek Watershed would be removed through implementation of the dispersed retention prescription that is a part of VRH. This would not bear any regional, statewide, national or international importance.

Intensity

The Council on Environmental Quality includes the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity.

**Test for Significant Impacts.**

1. Has significant impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (1))?  
 Yes                       No

**Remarks:**

The proposed action could have potentially beneficial and adverse impacts but they would be consistent with the range and scope of effects analyzed and described in the 1994 *Final - Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* (1994 PRMP/EIS), which analyzed the timber management program for the Roseburg District, to which the EA is tiered.

The application of VDT under the proposed action alternative will improve tree health and vigor within the treated forest stands as well as enhancing the commercial value of timber in the Matrix land use allocation. Thinning will also accelerate attainment of Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives in the Riparian Reserves (EA p. 106).

Variable retention harvest of 98 acres, including 63 acres of dispersed retention, will result in a small increase in the amount of early seral habitat within the Calapooya Creek Watershed (EA pp. 44-45). The early seral habitat will provide open canopy conditions, that when combined with un-treated aggregates and thinned forest habitat, will provide vegetative and structural diversity for wildlife species associated with complex forest habitat (EA p. 82).

Timber harvest will also provide trees for manufacturing, which in turn will provide employment, wages to timber workers and employees in associated industries, and generate tax revenues for local, state and federal governments.

Potential beneficial or adverse effects to species listed under the Endangered Species Act, and critical habitat designated for their survival and recovery are addressed below at Consideration 9.

2. Has significant adverse impacts on public health or safety (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (2))?  
 Yes                       No

**Remarks:**

The proposed action is a timber management project that is located in a rural setting, removed from urban and metropolitan areas, on a landscape of Federal and private lands that are principally managed for timber production, and as such would not be expected to have any demonstrable effects on public health and safety.

As described in the EA (p. 111), the Calapooya Creek project is within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) as identified in the Fire Management Plan for the Coos Bay/Roseburg Fire Management Zone.

Under the proposed action alternative, activity fuels at landings will be machine piled and burned during fall or winter months when weather conditions favor rapid smoke dispersion and precipitation will wash particulates from the air. In addition, small fuels, 3-6 inches in diameter, will be hand piled and burned within 50 feet of selected roadways, resulting in (EA p. 112) the reduction of activity fuels on approximately 211 acres in the Calapooya Creek project area (EA p. 112).

There will be no significant effect to air quality because prescribed burning would be conducted under the requirements of the Oregon Smoke Management Plan in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Clean Air Act. Slash will be burned during the late-fall to mid-spring season when the soil, duff layer (soil surface layer consisting of fine organic material), and large down log moisture levels are high and atmospheric conditions are conducive to smoke dispersion and particulate removal (EA p.27).

There will be no significant effect to water quality or quantity. The no-harvest buffers and implementation of project design features will prevent disturbance to stream banks and channels, intercept surface runoff and prevent sediment from entering streams so there will be no impact on water quality, beneficial uses of water, or municipal drinking water sources in or downstream from the project area (EA p. 105).

3. Adversely effects such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation, or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains or ecologically significant or critical areas including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (3))?

( ) Yes                      (✓) No

**Remarks:**

Resources having unique geographic characteristics, such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Research Natural Areas, prime or unique farm lands, floodplains/wetlands, solid or hazardous waste, developed recreation sites, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics are not present and will not be affected by the Calapooya Creek project (EA p. 30).

As described in the EA (p. 31), cultural resource clearances have been completed within harvest units and locations of proposed road construction. The most recent surveys identified two previously undocumented sites including OR-10-326 and OR-10-327. Site OR-10-326 is located outside of the project area and will not be impacted by proposed actions. Site OR-10-327 is a historic trail, in use in modern times, with no historic integrity. This site, which runs through the proposed project area, is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and will not be managed for conservation.

If any cultural resources (e.g. historic or prehistoric objects, features, or structures) are found during the implementation of the proposed action, operations will be suspended until the site has been evaluated to determine its significance and the appropriate mitigation action that would be applied (EA p. 26). Ultimately, the Calapooya Creek project will have no impact on historic or cultural resources.

4. Has highly controversial effects on the quality of the human environment (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (4))?

Yes  No

**Remarks:**

The BLM has conducted timber management across western Oregon for decades. The environmental effects of the project are within the scope of effects considered and analyzed in the 1994 Roseburg District PRMP/EIS and adopted by the 1995 Roseburg District ROD/RMP. Effects are expected to be consistent with those of the published literature cited in the EA, and are not expected to be highly controversial, in a scientific sense. However, the Roseburg District BLM acknowledges that there may be social controversy or differences of opinion regarding the proposed action, but this does not equate to scientific controversy over the nature of effects of the proposal. No unique, appreciable, or serious questions regarding scientific controversy have been identified regarding the effects of the proposed action. The BLM is aware that the fundamental nature of science requires disagreement and vigorous debate, and as a result some disagreement will always be present in any scientific discussion.

The public was afforded multiple opportunities to comment on this project. A notice of project initiation was published in the Roseburg District Quarterly Planning Update (Spring 2013) informing the general public of the nature of the proposed action. Letters were sent to landowners with property adjacent to BLM-administered lands where timber harvest is proposed, those whose property lies beside or astride identified haul routes, and those with registered surface water rights for domestic use located within one mile downstream of any proposed units. They were encouraged to share any concerns or special knowledge of the project area that they may have (EA, p. 119). No responses were received.

Letters were sent to the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz requesting identification of any special interests or legal rights in the lands in question (EA, p. 119). No responses were received.

Informal scoping comments were received from two organizations and were given due consideration in this analysis (EA, pp. 5-13). While comments were received expressing disagreement with the BLM timber management program, none established scientific controversy regarding the outcome of the proposed action.

The CEQ guidelines related to controversy refer not to the amount of public opposition or support for a project, but to a substantial dispute as to the size, nature, or effect of the action. The 1994 Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statements (PRMP/EIS; USDI/BLM 1994; p. Appendices 233) projected effects for 11,875 acres of regeneration harvest in the first decade (1995-2004) and 11,193 acres of regeneration harvest in the second decade (2005-2014). In actuality, the Roseburg District offered and harvested 1,825 acres of regeneration harvest (15 percent of the projected amount of regeneration harvest) in the first decade and 194 acres of regeneration harvest (1.7 percent of the projected amount of regeneration harvest) in the second decade. Under the PRMP/EIS, the projected effects in the third decade (2015-2024) were based upon 9,808 acres of regeneration harvest. The Calapooya Creek Harvest Plan project is one of the first projects in the third decade, and includes 1.0 percent of the projected decadal regeneration harvest. Given the discrepancy between the acreage of regeneration harvest assumed within the effects analysis of PRMP/EIS and what the Roseburg District has actually implemented, it is clear that the incremental effects of the harvest proposed in the Calapooya Creek Harvest Plan project are well within the effects of the total regeneration harvest projected in the Roseburg District PRMP/EIS.

The EA contains analysis of effects on relevant elements of the human environment. The BLM will apply VRH to 98 acres of forest stands that are less than 80 years old. The effects associated with this project are described at the site-specific level in the EA and are not scientifically controversial because these stands are structurally simple and less than 80 years old. Project activities will not occur in highly complex northern spotted owl habitat (EA, p. 55, 73). Seasonal restrictions will prevent potential disturbance to nesting northern spotted owls (EA, pp.28, 61). Therefore, the proposed action is consistent with the Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl (2011 Recovery Plan; USDA/FWS 2011) recommendations for active management and application of disturbance-based principles to promote ecological goals (EA, p. 72).

The BLM is also aware that the 2011 Recovery Plan uses the word ‘controversy’ in its discussion of northern spotted owls and ecological forestry (p. III-11). A thorough reading of the full discussion in the 2011 Recovery Plan, however, reveals that the controversy is not related to the size, nature, or effect of ecological forestry, but instead to the ongoing societal controversy over managing Pacific Northwest forests. Correspondingly, the 2011 Recovery Plan identified that:

The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife] Service continues to recommend that active forest management and disturbance-based principles be applied throughout the range of the spotted owl with the goal of maintaining or restoring forest ecosystem structure, composition and processes so they are sustainable and resilient under current and future climate conditions in order to provide for long-term conservation of the species. The majority of published studies support this general approach for Pacific Northwest forests, although there is some disagreement regarding how best to achieve it. We received widely varying recommendations for meeting this goal from knowledgeable scientists. Most of this variance in opinion is due to the scientific uncertainty in: (1) accurately describing the ecological “reference condition” or the “natural range of variability” in historical ecological processes, such as fire and insect outbreaks across the varied forest landscape within the range of the spotted owl (e.g., see Hessburg et al. 2005, and Keane et al. 2002, 2009); and (2) confidently predicting future ecological outcomes on this landscape due to rapid, climate-driven changes in these natural processes, with little precedent in the historical (or prehistoric) record (Drever et al. 2006, Millar et al. 2007, Long 2009, Littell et al. 2010). These are very real problems that should be addressed with more research (Strittholt et al. 2006, Kennedy and Wimberly 2009). In the meantime, addressing this uncertainty in a careful but active manner is the challenge of this Revised Recovery Plan and of forest management in general (See 2011 Recovery Plan at III-13).

While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in the 2011 Recovery Plan identified differences of scientific opinion regarding the informational needs for active forest management to achieve the goals of forest restoration for achieving northern spotted owl recovery, this difference in scientific opinion does not rise to the level of a highly controversial scientific debate that requires an EIS for this project. The difference of opinion on informational needs does not demonstrate a scientific controversy over the use of active forest management to restore ecological processes. As the 2011 Recovery Plan stated: “There is a scientific and social consensus emerging that land managers must restore more sustainable (resistant and resilient) ecological processes to forests at various landscape scales (Hessburg et al. 2004, Millar et al. 2007, Long 2009, Moritz et al. 2011) (See RPNSO at III-12).” The Service’s 2011 Recovery Plan identification of “consensus” on this issue demonstrates that there is no serious question on whether scientific controversy exists over the use of active forest management through projects like the proposed action to achieve long-term northern spotted owl recovery. This kind of policy debate is a sign of healthy discussion, but not of controversy as NEPA uses the term, and thus is

not evidence of a substantial dispute over the size or nature of proposed action effects. The 2011 Recovery Plan goes on to state that:

Federal land managers should apply ecological forestry principles where long-term spotted owl recovery will benefit, even if short-term impacts to spotted owls may occur (Franklin et al. 2006) to improve the resiliency of the landscape in light of threats to spotted owl habitat from climate change and other disturbances. This includes early-successional ecosystems on some forest sites (Swanson et al. 2010, Perry et al. 2011) (See 2100 Recovery Plan at III-14, EA p. 2).

Restoration activities conducted near spotted owl sites should first focus on areas of younger forest less likely to be used by spotted owls and less likely to develop late-successional forest characteristics without vegetation management. Vegetation management should be designed to include a mix of disturbed and undisturbed areas, retention of woody debris and development of understory structural diversity to maintain small mammal populations across the landscape (See 2011 Recovery Plan at III-17).

Thus, the reasoning of the 2011 Recovery Plan supporting management action defines the low level of controversy connected to the proposed action. Again, the controversy referenced in the 2011 Recovery Plan is largely referring to the “social controversy” of implementing active forest management to achieve restoration goals. The 2011 Recovery Plan does identify differences in scientific opinion about information needs associated with implementing such actions, but not whether such actions should be undertaken, particularly in younger stands.

While some public comments expressed disagreement with the proposed action, none of the comments established a scientific basis for disagreement about the nature of effects that have not been analyzed within the EA and/or Biological Assessment. The BLM is aware that social controversy is ongoing over the existence and practices of timber harvest on public lands across western Oregon. The BLM has found that none of the comments received from the public establish a dispute over the size, nature, or effects of the action. Because those comments do not establish such a dispute, the proposed action is not controversial under NEPA.

5. Has highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks to the human environment (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (5))?

Yes                       No

**Remarks:**

This project is not unique as the BLM has been conducting timber management across western Oregon for many decades. There is also a wide body of literature describing the environmental effects of such forest management activity. As such, the BLM has concluded that effects would not be highly uncertain. The environmental effects of the proposed action alternative are fully analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA (pp. 32-117).

Climate change and greenhouse gas emissions have been identified as an emerging resource concern by the Secretary of the Interior (Secretarial Order No. 3226; January 16, 2009), the OR/WA BLM State Director (IM-OR-2010-012, January 13, 2010), and by the general public through comments on recent project analyses (EA p. 114).

The U.S. Geological Survey, in a May 14, 2008 memorandum (USDI USGS 2008) to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, summarized the latest science on greenhouse gas emissions and concluded that difficulties remain in simulating and attributing observed temperature changes at smaller than continental scales and that it is currently beyond the scope of existing science to identify a specific source of greenhouse gas emissions or sequestration and designate it as the cause of specific climate impacts at a specific location.

As described in the EA (pp. 114-117) the total direct carbon release under the action alternative is 5,736 tonnes. Direct release of carbon under this action alternative would be undetectable at only 0.0003 percent of annual emissions in the United States, and 0.00008 percent of annual global emissions.

Conclusions in the EA (p. 116) indicate that the total carbon balance of 593.71 tonnes per acre at 50 years following harvest is less than the balance of 738.77 tonnes per acre determined for the No Action Alternative at 50 years. These conclusions are in line with current research (EA Appendix G). In addition, the total carbon balance at 50 years following harvest is also greater than the current balance of 315.31 tonnes per acre, thus showing that a net gain in carbon storage occurs under both the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives. The effects of the action are not highly uncertain and do not present unique or unknown risks with regard to carbon storage and release.

6. Establishes a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (6))?

Yes  No

**Remarks:** The advertisement, auction, and award of a timber sale contract are part of a well-established practice for BLM forest management and completion of that process for the proposed action will not establish a precedent or represent a decision in principle for future actions. Any new proposals for timber management will be subject to site-specific evaluation and analysis independent of the analysis and decision completed for this project.

7. Is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (7))?

Yes  No

**Remarks:**

The interdisciplinary team considered the proposed action in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. The cumulative impacts to forest vegetation (p. 44), wildlife (pp. 73-75, 78, 82, 85, 88), soils (p. 94), hydrology, aquatic habitat and fisheries (pp. 105-106), noxious weeds (p. 108), and carbon storage (pp. 116-117) were analyzed in the EA and were found to not be significant, thus there would not be cumulatively significant effects predicted from implementation of the proposed action.

As stated previously, the 1994 PRMP/EIS and 1995 ROD/RMP predicted the amount of regeneration harvest that would occur each decade, and given that less than ten percent has been implemented to date, we are well below the amount of harvest authorized under the RMP hence we are below the thresholds of significance set forth in those documents.

8. Has adverse effects on districts, sites, highways, structures, or 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 (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (8))?  
 Yes  No

**Remarks:**

As discussed in Consideration 3 above, cultural resource inventories within the proposed Calapooya Creek harvest units and locations of proposed road construction are complete. The most recent surveys identified two previously undocumented sites including OR-10-326 and OR-10-327. Site OR-10-326 is located outside of the project area and will not be impacted by proposed actions. Site OR-10-327 is a historic trail, in use in modern times, with no historic integrity. This site, which runs through the proposed project area, is not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and will not be managed for conservation. Ultimately, the Calapooya Creek project will have no impact on documented historic properties (EA p. 31).

If any cultural resources (e.g. historic or prehistoric objects, features, or structures) are found during the implementation of the proposed action, operations would be suspended until the site has been evaluated to determine its significance and the appropriate mitigation action that would be applied (EA p. 26). In this way, no cultural resources will be affected by the Calapooya Creek project.

9. 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 (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (9))?
- |                   |                              |  |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Botanical Species | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Fish Species      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Wildlife Species  | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

**Remarks:**

Surveys of suitable habitat in the Calapooya Creek project area did not identify any federally threatened or endangered botanical species thus the project will have no effect on listed botanical species (EA, p. 109).

Analysis in the EA has determined that any impacts to water temperature, substrate/sediment quality, large wood, pool quality, or habitat access within the project area will be non-existent or immeasurable above background levels. Aquatic habitat in Coon Creek, Gossett Creek, Haney Creek, Mill Creek, Boyd Creek, Oldham Creek, Gassy Creek, Slide Creek, and Field Creek will be unaffected, except for short-term reductions in the amount of large and small functional wood available to the stream. Due to the high volume of wood already in the streams and the high density of trees in the no-harvest buffers, fish species and populations in the streams in the project area will be unaffected. Thus, the Calapooya Creek project will not have an effect on Oregon Coast coho salmon or its habitat (EA p. 105).

As described in the EA (p. 28, 61) there will be no effect to northern spotted owls due to disturbance/disruption because all harvest activities would be conducted outside of the minimum disruption thresholds for northern spotted owl sites in the Calapooya Creek project area.

Variable density thinning will remove canopy cover however the stands will continue to function as dispersal habitat because canopy closure will be maintained between 44 and 76 percent (EA p. 61). Large remnant trees, hardwoods, snags, and coarse down wood will be reserved and over time, the proposed thinning treatments will enhance nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat, improve habitat connectivity, and reduce the risk of habitat loss from stand-replacing wildfires. Consequently, the proposed action will result in a beneficial effect to northern spotted owl habitat in the long-term (EA p. 62).

Variable retention harvest will result in the downgrade of 98 acres of northern spotted owl dispersal habitat within two project units (EA p. 65-66). However, VRH will not occur within any spotted owl home range, core area or nest patch. Implementation of VRH outside of spotted owl home ranges will allow retention trees to grow larger faster, to develop suitable wildlife habitat characteristics, such as large limbs and crowns, and will promote habitat conditions that would have a beneficial effect on northern spotted owl prey species (EA p. 67). Development of these habitat components will have beneficial effects on future northern spotted owl suitable habitat by providing multiple canopy structure and diversity within the treated stands (EA p. 71).

As discussed previously in Consideration 4, the Calapooya Creek project is consistent with the recommendations in the Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl (2011 Recovery Plan; USDA/FWS 2011) for active management and application of disturbance-based principles to promote ecological goals (EA, p. 72).

As structural components of spotted owl nesting habitat such as large diameter trees and snags, multiple canopy layers, large coarse woody debris, and hunting perches, develop following implementation of VDT, the amount of available northern spotted owl nesting habitat will increase thus resulting in a beneficial effect to northern spotted owl critical habitat unit (EA p. 71).

In spotted owl critical habitat, VRH will remove and downgrade 84-acres of dispersal habitat to capable habitat within one project unit, affecting 0.1 percent of Critical Habitat Sub-Unit WCS-6 (EA p. 71) of which approximately 57,210 acres occur on the Roseburg District. Canopy cover of the treated stand is expected to recover to 40 percent or more in approximately 25 years resulting in dispersal habitat that will be of higher quality and of greater benefit to spotted owls than would develop under pre-treatment conditions (EA p. 71). The second variable retention harvest unit (14 acres) is not within spotted owl critical habitat.

10. Threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR §1508.27(b) (10))?

( ) Yes                      (✓) No

**Remarks:**

The project conforms to and is consistent with the Roseburg District's 1995 Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan (EA p. 6). Furthermore, the design features described within the EA ensure that the proposed action complies with all applicable laws (EA p. 8).

With respect to environmental justice, the proposed action is consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice (EA, p. 30). No potential impacts to low-income or minority populations have been identified by the BLM internally or through public involvement. Employment associated with the sales will involve local contractors who engage in similar work throughout Douglas County. Correspondence with local tribal governments did not identify any Native American religious concerns about the project.

Finding

Based on the analysis of potential impacts contained in the EA, I have determined that the Calapooya Creek Harvest Plan will not have a significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and that an environmental impact statement is not required. I have further determined that the proposed action conforms to management direction from the Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan approved by the Oregon/Washington State Director on June 2, 1995.



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Max Yager  
Field Manager  
Swiftwater Field Office

8-13-15  
Date