

# Lower Cow Creek 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management

EA# OR-105-07-11

South River Field Office

Date Prepared: August 4, 2008

## Finding of No Significant Impact

### *Overview*

Units selected for treatment under the Lower Cow Creek commercial thinning and density management project are located in: Section 13, T. 30 S., R. 7 W.; Sections 25, 27 and 35, T. 30 S., R. 8 W.; Sections 7, 13, 15, 17 and 19, T. 31 S., R. 6 W.; and Section 13, T. 31 S., R. 7 W., W.M. A description of the commercial thinning and density management proposal is in Chapter Two of the EA (p. 3-10). Both context and intensity must be considered in determining significance of the environmental effects of agency action (40 CFR 1508.27):

### *Context*

The proposed action is a site-specific thinning and density management of approximately 725 acres in the South River Resource Area. The treatment will occur within the Lower Cow Creek 5<sup>th</sup> field watershed of approximately 102,447 acres. As this is largely an intermediate treatment affecting 0.7% of the watershed, it does not bear any regional, statewide, national or international importance.

### *Intensity*

The Council on Environmental Quality includes the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity at 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. *Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The proposed action will have a positive impact on treated forest vegetation, enhancing commercial value of timber within the Matrix land use allocation, and accelerating the development of late-successional stand characteristics within the Late-Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve land use allocations (EA, p. 14-18)

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety*

The proposed action is a vegetation treatment that will not affect public health or safety because the project will occur in a landscape removed from residential centers and dominated by Federal and industrial forest land. Further, as found in the EA (p.44), fuel loads will be managed and any remaining additional fuels will not substantially increase the fire risk within the area.

3. *Unique characteristics such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The project area is comprised of O&C timberland. Most of the units have been inventoried for cultural and historic resources; no historic resources of significance have been found to date. If cultural resources are found in the remaining units, appropriate mitigation will be applied (EA p. 44). Other unique characteristics (such as wild and scenic rivers) do not occur within the project area.

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

The BLM conducts thinning and density management regularly across western Oregon. There is also a wide body of literature describing the effects of such forest management activity. Effects are expected to be consistent with those of the published literature cited in the EA, and are not expected to be highly controversial.

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

This project is not unique as the BLM regularly conducts thinning and density management. When pairing professional experience with the substantial literature on the topic, there is little uncertainty regarding the effects of the proposed action. The environmental effects are fully analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA (p. 11-44).

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

The advertisement, auction, and award of a timber sale contract allowing the harvest of trees is a well-established practice and will not establish a precedent for future actions, nor will it represent any decision in principle about future considerations.

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

The interdisciplinary team considered the proposed action in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions; no significant effects are predicted. Cumulative effects to resources are discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA (p. 11-44).

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Historic Register or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

As discussed above, surveys for cultural and historic resources are complete for almost all units; to date, no such resources have been found warranting mitigation. If cultural and historic resources are found in the remaining units, appropriate mitigation will be applied (EA p. 44). As such, the project will not adversely affect any of the aforementioned resources.

9. *The degree to which an 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.*

The EA carefully considered the potential effects to the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet (p. 21-23). Given project design features and seasonal restrictions (EA, p.8-9, the proposed action is not expected to have adverse impacts on individual spotted owls or murrelets. The proposed action is not expected to reduce the ability of affected home ranges to support spotted owls, and does not affect any suitable habitat for the spotted owl. The proposed action is not expected to affect the availability of suitable marbled murrelet habitat. In the long term, density management will benefit both species by accelerating the development of both desirable habitat features and contiguous suitable habitat in LSR 259. This will improve the ability of LSR 259 to support reproducing spotted owls and murrelets.

Proposed units occur in two critical habitat units for the spotted owl (OR-62 and OR-63) (EA, p. 21-22). The BLM consulted with US Fish and Wildlife Service on the effects to spotted owl critical habitat. This analysis determined that the post-treatment habitat availability and connectivity in critical habitat units OR-62 and OR-63 will continue to provide for the survival and recovery of spotted owls. (Ref. #1-15-05-I-0511).

At the time of the environmental analysis and public comment on the EA, the Oregon Coast coho salmon was proposed for listing; it is now listed as Federally-threatened. The Oregon Coast coho salmon is present in Cow Creek and its tributaries. The change in listing status does not affect the physical effects of the action, however. Based upon the site-specific project design features, the Lower Cow Creek project will not result in sediment delivery to streams, will not influence peak stream flows, will not reduce large wood recruitment, and will not affect access to spawning and rearing habitat. As such, the proposed action will have no effect on coho salmon or their designated critical habitat in or adjacent to the project area (EA, p. 37-40).

Essential Fish Habitat, as designated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act of 1996, is found within the project area. However, because the proposed action will not affect the components of Essential Fish Habitat, the action will not adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat for coho or Chinook salmon in Cow Creek or its major tributaries (EA, p. 40).

*10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action was designed in conformance with management direction from the RMP, which itself is in conformance with all applicable laws and regulations. Furthermore, the design features described within the EA ensure that the proposed action complies with all applicable laws (ROD/RMP p. 5).

***Finding***

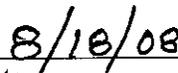
Based on the discussion above and the information in the Environmental Assessment (EA) #OR-105-07-11, it is my determination that implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those already addressed in the following:

- *The Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (USDA & USDI 1994);*

- *Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/EIS) (October 1994); and the*
- *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Management of Port-Orford-Cedar in Southwest Oregon (2004).*

This proposed action is in conformance with the Roseburg District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (June 1995) as amended. The proposed action does not, in and of itself, constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

  
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Ralph Thomas  
Field Manager  
South River Field Office

  
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Date