

“DRAFT”

**Myrtle Creek Commercial Thinning and Density Management
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

South River Field Office
EA# OR-105-05-09

Date Prepared: March 16, 2006

Finding of No Significant Impact

The South River Field Office, Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has completed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Myrtle Creek Commercial Thinning and Density Management project. Two alternatives are analyzed in detail, consisting of the Proposed Action, Alternative One, and No Action, Alternative Two. Two additional alternatives that were considered but not analyzed in detail are also described (EA, pp. 11-13).

Units proposed for treatment were selected through field reconnaissance and stand examinations. The units are located in: Sections 17, 21, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35 and 36, T. 28 S., R. 3 W.; Sections 9, 11 and 21, T. 29 S. R. 3 W.; and Sections 1 and 3, T. 29 S., R. 4 W., W.M. A description of the “Proposed Action” is located in Chapter 2 of the EA (pp. 5-10).

Unaffected Resources

As addressed in the EA (p. 13), the following Critical Elements of the Human Environment would not be affected because they are absent from the proposed project area: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; wilderness; waste, solid or hazardous; and Wild and Scenic Rivers. No unique characteristics would be impacted (Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations - 40 CFR § 508.27(b) (3)).

Environmental Justice

The Myrtle Creek Commercial Thinning and Density Management proposal is consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice in minority and low-income populations. As discussed in the EA (p. 13), no potential impacts to low-income or minority populations have been identified by the BLM internally or through the public involvement process. Employment associated with the project would be performed by local contractors engaged in similar types of work throughout Douglas County. Correspondence with local tribal governments did not identify any unique or special resources in the project area which provide religious, employment, subsistence or recreation opportunities.

Cultural and Historical Resources

As described in the EA (p. 30), five cultural sites have been previously identified in proximity to proposed thinning units. Two of the sites would be outside of proposed units and would not be affected. One site was determined not “significant”¹ as defined in the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations, while another was. The fifth site has not been evaluated yet. Pedestrian surveys would be conducted of the remaining units, and if additional sites are located, the BLM will consult with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office on potential effects of the proposed thinning and density management project. Where effects to a site deemed “significant” would be expected, the site would be avoided or mitigated by extraction of a portion of the information contained at the site. As a consequence, there would be no adverse impacts to scientific, cultural, or historical resources (40 CFR § 1508.27(b)(8)).

Wildlife

A meta-analysis of available demographic data for the **northern spotted owl** was conducted in 2004 by Anthony et al. combining population data from 14 study areas located throughout the range of the spotted owl. In 1999, Lint et al. found that owl populations were declining range-wide, particularly in the State of Washington. This information was synthesized with existing literature in *Scientific Evaluation of the Status of the Northern Spotted Owl* in 2004 by Courtney et al. Causes of population decline could not be identified with certainty, but researchers feel that a combination of previous habitat loss, recent loss of habitat to wildfire, predation on spotted owls, weather, prey abundance, and competition from barred owls is responsible. Researchers also noted that the importance of each of these agents likely varies by region.

Spotted owl populations in the Klamath Mountains physiographic province were shown to be stable or declining very slightly. This finding is consistent with the prediction of the Northwest Forest Plan that populations would slowly decline and eventually reach equilibrium with available habitat. Courtney et al. stated that: “the fact of such a decline is not in and of itself unexpected or reason to doubt the effectiveness of the core NWFP strategy.”

As stated in the EA (p. 17), none of the proposed units are located within critical habitat units designated for the survival and recovery of the northern spotted owl.

As noted in the EA (p. 41), Unit 28-3-26A is overlapped by the Curtin Creek and Johnson Creek home ranges. Density management would downgrade function of the stand from suitable habitat to dispersal-only habitat by reducing horizontal and vertical cover, removing potential hunting perches, and disturbing coarse woody debris providing habitat for prey species. Thinning of the remaining units would modify dispersal-only habitat, but owls would be expected to continue to use the stands because canopy cover would exceed 40 percent with mean tree diameters greater than 11 inches, figures widely accepted as a threshold for dispersal function.

¹ Significance refers to the value of the resource as defined in the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations, rather than effects as described in the National Environmental Policy Act and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality.

No effect to spotted owls from noise disruption would be expected, as thinning operations would either occur outside of the disruption threshold for known spotted owl sites or activity centers, or be seasonally restricted from March 1st to June 30th if within the disruption threshold of unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat. Seasonal restrictions could be waived until March 1st of the following year if surveys indicate that spotted owls are not present, not nesting, or failed in nesting. These factors would ensure that noise disruption would not cause spotted owls to abandon nests or fledge prematurely.

As described in the EA (p. 19), habitat for the **Oregon shoulderband snail** (*Helminthoglypta hertlieni*), a Bureau Sensitive species, is present throughout the project area. As discussed in the EA (p. 43), surveys would be conducted where suitable habitat exists, and if snails are found they would be protected by altering unit configurations, designating buffers, or implementing other measures to provide suitable microclimate, undisturbed substrate, and vegetation or down wood. These measures would ensure that, if present, viable populations of these species would remain in the project area, and that the proposed action would not contribute to a future need to list the species under the Endangered Species Act.

The **northern goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*) is a large forest-dwelling hawk found throughout temperate forested regions of the northern hemisphere. As discussed in the EA (p. 19), nesting goshawks have been previously located in Section 17, T. 28 S., T. 3 W. in proximity to Units 28-3-17 B, C and D. Units 28-3-26 A and 28-3-21 A would also provide suitable habitat because of the presence of large trees with nesting structure, a high degree of canopy cover, and a sufficiently open understory allowing for sub-canopy flight, while the remaining units would be of marginal utility because of small tree size and high tree density.

The proposed thinning would reduce the suitability of Units 28-3-17 D, 28-3-26 A and 28-3-21 A for goshawk nesting by reducing canopy cover and potential nesting structure in the near term. As the Northwest Forest Plan continues to be implemented, however, goshawk populations as a whole are expected to stabilize in a well-distributed pattern across federal land (FSEIS 3&4-179).

To avoid disturbance during nesting and fledging season, thinning operations would be prohibited on Units B and D, and the upper half of Unit C from March 1st through August 30th.

The **peregrine falcon** (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) is a raptor once designated as a Federally-threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. As described in the EA (p. 19), there is a known aerie within a mile of proposed Unit 28-3-35A. The proposed thinning would not modify nesting or foraging habitat. To avoid disturbance during nesting and fledging, seasonal restrictions described in the EA (p. 10), operations would be prohibited between January 1st and August 15th, but could be waived earlier if no young are present, or once the young have fledged.

Purple martins (*Progne subis*), **Townsend's big-eared bats** (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), **Pacific pallid bats** (*Antrozous pallidus pacificus*), and **fringed myotis bats** (*Myotis thysanodes*) might also be expected in the project area where they would use trees in the forests stands for roosting. As discussed in the EA (pp. 43-44), while some limited amount of nesting or roosting habitat for these species could be lost to thinning operations, the proposed action could indirectly

benefit them by accelerating the development of late-successional forest conditions providing suitable habitat. This would provide additional quality habitat in Riparian Reserves not scheduled for regeneration harvest, and in stands in Connectivity/Diversity Blocks scheduled for longer harvest rotations than those in the General Forest Management Area. Consequently, the proposed action would not be expected to contribute to a need to list any of these species under the Endangered Species Act.

As addressed in the EA (p. 21), there are only two wildlife species designated for protection under the Survey & Manage standards and guidelines that might be expected in the project area. One is the Siskiyou or Chace sideband snail (*Monadenia chaceana*), which is also a Bureau Sensitive species, and the other is the great gray owl (*Strix nebulosa*).

As described in the EA (p. 19), suitable habitat for the **Chace sideband snail** is present throughout the project area. As discussed in the EA (p. 43), surveys would be conducted where suitable habitat exists, and if snails are found they would be protected by altering unit configurations, designating buffers, or implementing other measures to provide suitable microclimate, undisturbed substrate, and vegetation or down wood. These measures would ensure that, if present, viable populations of these species would remain in the project area.

Suitable habitat for **great gray owls** is characterized by: (1) large diameter nest trees, (2) forest canopy providing roosting cover, and (3) proximity [within 200m] to openings ten acres or larger in size that could be used as foraging areas. As documented in the EA (p. 21), an evaluation indicates that there are no natural meadows or openings ≥ 10 acres within 200m of the proposed thinning units so no effects to great gray owls would be expected.

Botany

As described in the EA (p. 22), based on the availability of suitable habitat, surveys would be conducted for Kincaid's lupine, BLM Special Status vascular plants, and Special Attention (Survey & Manage) Species described in Appendix C of the EA that might be expected in the project watershed. If surveys locate any of these species, the sites would be managed such that persistence of the populations would be provided for, and no need for listing of species under the Endangered Species Act would be expected.

In the case of fungi, known sites of Bureau Sensitive species would not be affected by the proposed thinning and density management because of the spatial distances from thinning units documented in the EA (p. 22). While it is acknowledged that thinning and density management could result in the loss of unknown sites, it would not be expected that this would lead to a need to list any of these under the Endangered Species Act because, as discussed in the EA (p. 48), suitable fungi habitat is expected to remain abundant and well-distributed.

Fisheries

There are no listed fish species in the project area or on the entire Roseburg District but, as described in the EA (p. 26), Essential Fish Habitat is present within two miles of all proposed

unit and in two instances adjacent to proposed units. The only potential effect identified is with respect to sediment, but with implementation of the project design features and best management practices described in the EA (pp. 48-51) the risk for sediment and adverse effects to Essential Fish Habitat would be negligible.

For the reasons described above, there would be no significant adverse impacts to any special status species (40 CFR § 1508.27 (b) (9)). The anticipated impacts would be within the range and scope of those analyzed in the *Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (PRMP/EIS).

The project is consistent with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws (40 CFR § 1508.27(b) (10)).

Of the ten points listed under 40 CFR § 1508.27(b), the following were considered and were found not to apply to the proposed action: significant beneficial or adverse effects; significant effects on public health or safety; effects on the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial; anticipated cumulatively significant impacts; highly uncertain or unknown risks; and no precedents for future actions with significant effects.

Based on the analysis of potential impacts contained in the environmental assessment, I have determined that the proposed action will not have 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 determined that the proposed action is in within the scope of impacts anticipated in the PRMP/EIS, and is in conformance with the *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP) for the Roseburg District, approved by the Oregon/Washington State Director on June 2, 1995.

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Date