South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan
Environmental Assessment

EA# OR105-08-02
South River Field Office, Roseburg District

Finding of No Significant Impact

Date Prepared: June 11, 2009

Overview

Planning, design, and analysis for the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan project was conducted consistent with the management objectives and direction of the 1995 Roseburg District *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (1995 ROD/RMP).

Two alternatives were analyzed in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan EA, Alternative One (p. 5), No Action, and Alternative Two, the Proposed Action (EA, pp. 5-16). The following were proposed:

- Regeneration harvest of 236 acres located in Section 25, T. 29 S., R. 3 W.; and Sections 3 and 4, T. 30 S., R. 4 W., W.M.
- Commercial thinning and density management of 861 acres on Matrix lands located in Sections 8, 17, 18, and 19, T. 29 S., R. 2 W.; Sections 13, 25, 27, 33, and 35, T. 29 S., R. 3 W.; Section 9, T. 30 S., R. 2 W.; and Sections 3, 7, 15, 21, and 23, T. 30 S., R. 3 W., W.M.
- Density management of 448 acres located in Late-Successional Reserves in Sections 29, 32 and 33, T. 30 S., R. 4 W.; Section 25, T. 31 S., R. 3 W.; Sections 4, 9, 13, 21, 23, and 30, T. 31 S., R. 4 W.; and Section 25, T. 31 S., R. 5 W., W.M.

At the present time, implementation of the following actions proposed under Alternative Two will not be carried forward.

- Regeneration harvest in Section 25, T. 29 S., R. 3 W., W.M. and one unit proposed in Section 4, T. 30 S., R. 4 W., W.M;
- Commercial thinning and density management in the Matrix in Sections 8, 17, 18, and 19, T. 29 S., R. 2 W.; Sections 13 and 33, T. 29 S., R. 3 W.; and Sections 3 and 7, T. 30 S., R. 3 W., W.M.
- Density management in Late-Successional Reserves in Sections 29, 32 and 33, T. 30 S., R. 4 W.; Section 25, T. 31 S., R. 3 W.; and Sections 4, 9, 21 and 30, T. 31 S., R. 4 W., W.M.

On December 30, 2008, a new Roseburg District *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* became effective. It allows for transition projects that meet specific criteria to be implemented consistent with the management direction of either the 1995 or 2008 ROD/RMP, at the discretion of the decision maker (2008 ROD/RMP, pp. 5-6). This allows the BLM to utilize work already committed to the planning and analysis of the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan project and avoid disruption of the management of BLM-administered lands.

Regeneration harvest and commercial thinning and density management on the remaining units analyzed in the EA may be implemented consistent with management direction from the 1995 ROD/RMP because:

- No decisions were signed prior to December 30, 2008, the effective date of the 2008 ROD/RMP.
- Initiation for the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment occurred on November 29, 2007 and notice was published in the Winter 2007 Roseburg District Quarterly Planning Update. The EA was completed June 30, 2008, preceding the effective date of the 2008 ROD/RMP.
- Decisions for the timber sales being carried forward under the Proposed Action will be issued within two years of the effective date of the 2008 ROD/RMP.
- None of the sales employ regeneration harvest in a late-successional management area or any deferred timber management area designated by the 2008 ROD/RMP.
- None of the sales would result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat designated for species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

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

Context

The timber management plan is a site-specific plan for regeneration harvest, and commercial thinning and density management. These actions will occur entirely within the South Umpqua River fifth-field watershed which encompasses approximately 141,455 acre (EA, p. 19).

Regeneration harvest of approximately 133 acres of mature and late-seral forest represents approximately 0.4 percent of the mature and late-seral forest present on BLM-managed lands within the watershed.

Commercial thinning and density management of 1,309 acres of mid-seral forest represents the treatment of approximately 14 percent of the mid-seral forest on BLM-managed lands, and three percent of mid-seral forest in all ownerships within the watershed. Given the limited scope of the actions proposed, this project does not bear any regional, statewide, national or international importance.

Intensity

The Council on Environmental Quality identifies ten considerations for evaluating intensity.

1. *Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)

   Timber sales will provide employment associated with timber harvest which will generate additional employment in manufacturing and associated industrial and retail sectors. This employment will generate tax revenues to Federal, state and local government. Timber sale receipts will provide revenue to the Federal and county government.

Regeneration harvest will have the positive effect of harvesting forest stands beyond the culmination of mean annual increment, allowing for reforestation and growth of new stands consistent with the principal of sustained yield, and providing large timber for processing into specialty products.

Thinning and density management in mid-seral stands will improve tree health and vigor, enhance commercial value of timber in the Matrix land use allocations, and accelerate development of late-successional conditions in the Late-Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve land use allocations.

As discussed in Chapter Four of the EA (pp. 48-58), regeneration harvest will affect wildlife species that depend on late-seral habitat to varying degrees by removing cover, forage or nesting habitat. As described in the EA (p. 55), these effects would primarily be of a spatial nature as the abundance of late-seral forest managed by the BLM in the South Umpqua River watershed is expected to remain stable or gradually increase in the near and long terms.

Regeneration harvest would have beneficial effects on wildlife species that forage in early-seral habitat and on flowering plants that produce nectar (EA, pp. 50 and 58), and benefit plant species such as Kincaid's lupine and wayside aster that are dependent of open habitat and abundant sunlight (EA, p. 69).

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (2)

   Regeneration harvest, commercial thinning and density management will not affect public health or safety because as these actions will occur in a landscape removed from residential centers and dominated by Federal and industrial forest land. Further, as described in the EA (pp. 73-75), fuel loads will be managed so that there will be no substantial increase in 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.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (3)

   As addressed in the EA (p. 17), there are no Areas of Environmental Concern; prime farmlands; wetlands; wilderness; or wild and scenic rivers in proximity to any of the regeneration harvest, commercial thinning and density management units.

   Cultural clearances were completed in 2008 on all of the units being carried forward. One new cultural site was identified in proposed commercial thinning Unit 29-3-27 B. Unit boundaries were modified to exclude the site.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)

   Controversy refers to circumstances where a substantial dispute exists as to the environmental consequences of a proposed action, not philosophical opposition to a proposed action where the effects are relatively undisputed.

   The BLM has regularly conducted regeneration harvests for the past 60 years and widely applied thinning and density management over the past 15 years. There is also a wide body of literature describing the effects of such forest management activities. 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.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)

   This project is not unique because, as described above, the BLM has regularly conducted regeneration harvests for the past 60 years and commercial thinning and density management over the past 15 years. When pairing professional experience with the substantial literature on the topic, there is little uncertainty regarding the effects of the action. The environmental effects of the proposed timber harvest are fully analyzed in Chapter Four of the EA (pp. 40-75), and are within the scope of those analyzed in the 1994 Roseburg District *Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*.

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.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (6)

   The advertisement, auction, and award of timber sale contracts allowing the harvest of trees, within a discrete area, based on a site-specific analysis of effects and decisions that are made on a sale-by-sale basis in consideration of relevant information, is a well-established practice. It does not establish a precedent for future actions, nor represent any decision in principle about future considerations, as any new proposals would be subject to same site-specific evaluation, analysis, and authorization.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant impacts but cumulatively significant impacts.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (7)

   The interdisciplinary team considered the proposed action in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. No cumulatively significant effects to resources are predicted, as discussed in Chapter 4 of the EA (pp. 40-75).

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.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (8)

   As discussed above, surveys for cultural and historic resources have been completed. The single newly-discovered site is being avoided through project redesign, and will not be adversely affected.

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.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (9)

   The EA identified 27 northern spotted owl home ranges that could be affected to some degree, and in varying ways. With the modifications to the final harvest plan described on page 1, only nine historic and/or presently occupied home ranges would be affected.

   No regeneration harvest will occur within any home range, so the availability of suitable habitat in historic and/or occupied home ranges would be unaffected.

   Commercial thinning and density management will be applied to unsuitable and dispersal-only habitat. Removal of suppressed and intermediate canopy layers and some co-dominant and dominant trees will reduce canopy closure and create variable stand densities, resulting in reduced vertical and horizontal cover. Spotted owls are expected to continue to use these stands, though, because post-project canopy closure will remain above 40 percent and the quadratic mean diameter of trees in the stands will exceed 11 inches diameter breast height, figures widely used as a threshold for dispersal function. Use of thinned stands will likely be less than unthinned stands, though, until canopy closure returns to pre-treatment levels in 15-20 years.

   No direct effects to spotted owls are expected for the following reasons.

   - Road construction and timber harvest operations within the minimum disruption distances will be seasonally restricted from March 1 to July 15th, to ensure that noise disruption does not result in nest abandonment or premature fledging.

   - Removal of suitable habitat within 0.25 miles of any known spotted owl site, known owl activity center, or unsurveyed suitable habitat will be seasonally restricted from March 1 to September 30, ensuring that harvest activities would not affect pre-dispersal spotted owl fledglings or attendant adults through habitat modification.

   The EA (p. 49 and Appendix B) considered the findings of four recent reports on the status of the northern spotted owl and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *2008 Final Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl*.

The reports included *Scientific Evaluation of the Status of the Northern Spotted Owl, Status and Trends in Demography of Northern Spotted Owls, 1985-2003, Northern Spotted Owl Five Year Review: Summary and Evaluation*, and *Northwest Forest Plan – The First Ten Years (1994-2003): Status and trend of northern spotted owl populations and habitat*.

The reports suggest numerous possibilities for northern spotted owl population declines across large portions of the species' range. Among the potential factors identified are barred owl competition and timber harvest, including time lag from previous harvest.

Barred owl competition has not yet been systematically studied to determine whether it is a cause or a symptom of spotted owl population declines. Researchers indicate a need to further examine threats from barred owl competition.

When considering the level of regeneration harvest planned, in-growth of mid-seral stands, and present abundance of late-seral habitat on BLM-managed lands in the watershed, available habitat is not expected to change appreciably in the near term and gradually increase in the long term

Based on this information, the proposed timber harvest would not be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of northern spotted owls.

Surveys for the Federally-threatened Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus sulphureus* ssp. *kincaidii*) and Bureau Sensitive botanical species were completed. All results were negative, so there will be no effect to any known sites for special status botanical species.

As described in the EA (p. 30), the Federally-threatened Oregon Coast coho salmon is present in the watershed. Principal streams in proximity to timber management units designated as critical habitat are Days Creek and Saint John Creek, which are also designated as Essential Fish Habitat for coho salmon.

Potential effects to fish from timber harvest and hauling are associated with deposition of fine sediment and temporary increases in water turbidity. No such effects are expected for the following reasons. There will be no road construction in Riparian Reserves or any yarding through them. As discussed in the EA (p. 63), Riparian Reserves adjacent to regeneration harvest units, and variable width "no-harvest" buffers on streams in or adjacent to commercial thinning and density management units will precipitate and trap sediment borne by overland run-off.

Indirect effects related to renovation and use of existing roads could arise from the mobilization of fine sediments and its accumulation in stream gravels. Project design criteria described in the EA (p. 64) will minimize this risk such that effects at the project scale will be negligible and cumulative effects at the watershed scale non-existent.

For reasons discussed in the EA (pp. 62-63), it was concluded that the proposed action was not likely to adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat for coho or chinook salmon.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. . - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (10)

The proposed timber harvest plan was designed in conformance with management direction from the 1995 ROD/RMP, which is in conformance with all applicable laws and regulations (1995 ROD/RMP, pp. 15-16). Furthermore, the design features described within the EA ensure that the proposed action complies with all applicable laws.

With respect to environmental justice, the actions are consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice (EA, p. 17). No potential impacts to low-income or minority populations have been identified by the BLM internally or through public involvement. Employment associated with the regeneration harvest, commercial thinning and density management timbers sales would involve local contractors who engage in similar types of work throughout Douglas County.

Correspondence with local Native American tribal governments has not identified any known unique or special resources in the project areas which provide religious, employment, subsistence or recreation opportunities (EA, p. 17).

As discussed in the EA (p. 39), implementation of the Roseburg District *Integrated Weed Management Program*, in association with project design and contract provisions will minimize risk of introduction or spread of noxious weeds. As described in the EA (p. 16), these measures will include mulching disturbed areas and seeding with native grasses to discourage establishment of new weed populations and pressure washing or steam cleaning logging and road construction equipment prior to move-in to avoid introducing weeds from outside the project area. This is consistent with requirements of the Lacey Act; Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended; and Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA, I have determined that the timber harvest will not have any significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Furthermore, South River Field Office staff have reviewed the analysis contained in the South Umpqua River Watershed Harvest Plan Environmental Assessment in light of new information, such as the 2008 FEIS, and found that the existing analysis remains valid (Determination of NEPA Adequacy; DOI-BLM-OR-R050-2009-0012-DNA).

Ralph L. Thomas
Field Manager
South River Field Office

6/22/09
Date