

Lower Cow Creek 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management
EA# OR-105-07-11
South River Field Office
Date Prepared: January 28, 2008

DRAFT Finding of No Significant Impact

Overview

The South River Field Office, Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has completed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Lower Cow Creek 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management project. Two alternatives are analyzed in detail, consisting of the no action alternative (Alternative One), and the proposed action alternative (Alternative Two).

Units selected for treatment under the proposed action 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 would occur within the Lower Cow Creek 5th field watershed of approximately 102,447 acres. As this is considered 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 would 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 would not affect public health or safety.
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. The area will be inventoried for cultural and historic resources in the spring of 2008; if found, appropriate mitigation would 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. No effects are 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.*
As discussed above, this project is not unique; the BLM has extensive experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without significant effects. This proposed action does not set any precedent for future actions nor does 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, the area will be inventoried for cultural and historic resources in the spring of 2008; if found, appropriate mitigation would 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). 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, nor is the proposed action expected to affect the availability of suitable marbled murrelet habitat. In the long term, density management would benefit both species by accelerating the development of both desirable habitat features and contiguous suitable habitat in LSR 259. This would 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 would continue to provide for the survival and recovery of spotted owls. (Ref. #1-15-05-I-0511).

Presently, there are no fish listed under the Endangered Species Act on the Roseburg District; however, the Oregon Coast coho salmon is currently proposed for listing. Based upon the site-specific project design features, the Lower Cow Creek project would not result in sediment delivery to streams, would not influence peak stream flows, would not reduce large wood recruitment, and would not affect access to spawning and rearing habitat. As such, the proposed action would have no effect on coho salmon or their proposed 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 would 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 the RMP; as such the 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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Date