

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Oregon State Office
Salem District, Marys Peak Resource Area**

DECISION RECORD

School House Creek Restoration Project;
Project 3
Environmental Assessment Number: OR-080-04-22

Township 14 South, Range 8 West, Section 3; Willamette Meridian,
Benton County, Oregon.

A. Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to restore riparian habitat conditions in School House Creek, a tributary to the Alsea River. The proposed action would consist of alder and maple thinning, brush cutting, and conifer planting within approximately 2.8 acres of Riparian Reserve. The project is located in T 14 S, R 8 W, section 3, approximately 2 air miles west of the town of Alsea, Benton County, Oregon.

Historically, the School House Creek project area supported a riparian stand of mature conifer, which is essential for providing large woody debris material to the stream system. At present, the riparian canopy is dominated by hardwoods and areas adjacent to the 14-8-10.2 road and stream have become dominated by Himalayan blackberry. Because the Riparian Reserve of School House Creek has become dominated by these species, there is little opportunity for the recruitment of quality large woody debris (LWD) into the stream, now or in the future.

The Lower Alsea River Watershed Analysis provided specific recommendations to manage riparian zones in the watershed using a variety of methods including planting conifers; treating hardwood dominated stands which have the site potential to grow conifers; and accelerating the “development of large conifers by releasing understory conifers from dense hardwood canopies” (pgs. x, xiv, 88). There is a need to restore Riparian Reserve habitat and function by increasing tree species diversity, restoring conifers, and curtailing brush in the project area.

An environmental analysis was conducted and documented in the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), Environmental Assessment (EA) Number OR080-04-022.

Chapters 2 through 5 of the EA focused on the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences of six resource elements of the environment, for which potential impacts were identified including: invasive/non native plants, soils, hydrology, wildlife, fisheries and aquatic habitat, and fire hazard/risk. Other environmental elements were summarized in the EA under “Review of Critical Elements of the Environment” and “Review of Other Elements of the Environment” Tables (section 4.3). A separate Decision Record for projects 1, 2, and 4, as described in the EA, was signed on March 24, 2005. This Decision Record applies only to Project 3 – Riparian Restoration.

A copy of the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment and FONSI can be obtained from the Bureau of Land Management, Salem District Office, 1717 Fabry Road SE, Salem, Oregon 97306. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 7:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., closed on holidays. A copy is also available for review on the Internet at [http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning under Environmental Assessments, Marys Peak Resource Area](http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning_under_Environmental_Assessments_Marys_Peak_Resource_Area).

B. Decision

Based on the analysis contained in the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment, and management direction contained in the Salem District Resource Management Plan (RMP), I have decided to implement the proposed action for Project 3, herein known as the “selected alternative”, with modifications described below to protect a BLM tracking fungal species.

The selected alternative involves treating approximately 2.8 acres of Riparian Reserve by removing hardwoods, planting conifers, and cutting brush. Hardwoods in 3 treatment areas (from north to south: Unit 1 = 1.2 acres, Unit 2 = 0.5, & Unit 3 = 1.1 acres) would be cut and removed, with approximately 5% of the hardwoods being reserved. Logs would be yarded using a skidder winch line, a small mobile yarder, or similar equipment. Equipment would operate on the 14-8-10.2 road and use pre-existing skid trails to the extent possible. All tree species other than big leaf maple and alder would be reserved.

Western red cedar, western hemlock and small numbers of Douglas-fir would be planted on a variable spacing, ranging from 10-20 feet apart; for an estimated 110 conifers/acre. All brush in the treatment areas would be cut in order to create openings in which western red cedar, western hemlock and Douglas-fir would be planted.

Standard stocking surveys would be done after the first season’s growth of planted conifers, and at least every other year following planting until the trees are considered free to grow. Subsequent surveys would assess spacing and determine density management needs.

If the recommendation to cut vine maple and salmonberry ahead of logging is implemented, surveys would assess whether or not it is an effective tool for creating planting spots and alleviating problems with competing vegetation. It is likely that several future maintenance treatments, including brushing, would be necessary to assure the survival and growth of the planted conifers.

Fungi Protection Area: The BLM tracking species *Rickenella swartzii* was discovered during botanical/fungal surveys within the project area. In order to protect this resource, the boundaries of Unit 1 would be modified, reducing the total size of the treatment unit from approximately 1.8 acres to approximately 1.2 acres.

C. Alternatives Considered

The alternatives considered in detail included the “no action” alternative, and the proposed action alternative which initiated the environmental analysis process. Descriptions of the alternatives analyzed in detail are contained in the School House Creek Restoration Project Environmental Assessment, section 4.2. Because the project area would be smaller than the area analyzed within the Environmental Assessment, all potential environmental impacts resulting from the proposed action alternative have been adequately addressed in the EA document.

D. Reasons for the Decision

Considering public comment, the content of the School House Creek Restoration Project EA, the supporting project record, and the management direction contained in the Salem District RMP, I have decided to implement the selected alternative, as previously described. My rationale for this decision follows.

Project 3: The proposed action would help to restore Riparian conditions by removing hardwoods, re-establishing conifers and curtailing the spread of blackberry and brush. Historically, the School House Creek project area supported a Riparian stand of mature conifer, which is essential for providing LWD material to the stream system. Currently, the riparian canopy is dominated by hardwoods and areas adjacent to the 14-8-10.2 road and stream have become dominated by Himalayan Blackberries. Reducing the dense hardwood canopy through hardwood removal would allow the existing and planted conifers to become dominant in the future, thereby increasing species diversity and enhancing the quality of riparian forest habitat for wildlife species. Ideally, over the long term, the planted conifers will eventually overtop the remaining hardwoods, creating potential high quality terrestrial and aquatic down wood.

If the no action alternative were selected, the riparian habitat of School House Creek would remain degraded. No trees would be cut or yarded and a hardwood canopy would remain dominant in the project area. Existing understory western red cedar would likely slow in growth and possibly die before overstory hardwoods fall out of the canopy.

The resulting future stand would likely have relatively few Douglas fir in small groups surrounded by vine maple and salmonberry. Natural understory conifer establishment would be a very slow process, or possibly unlikely in such a stand. The area would remain as “non-habitat” for the majority of bureau special status plant species. A lack of conifer recruitment would maintain low levels of LWD in School House Creek for a long time.

E. Public Involvement and Comment Period

A description of the School House Creek Restoration project was included in the Salem Bureau of Land Management Project Update mailed in September 2004, December 2004, and March 2005 to more than 1200 individuals and organizations. A Scoping letter was mailed September 22, 2004 to 66 potentially interested parties. One telephone call was received requesting additional information about the projects and a project area map. A map and project description was mailed to the party and no further comments were received.

The School House Creek Restoration Project EA and FONSI were made available for a 30-day public review period starting on January 31st, 2005 and ending on March 1st, 2005. Fifty five letters announcing the availability of the EA and FONSI were sent out to notify agencies, tribes, groups, legislators, adjacent landowners, and individuals that have expressed general interest in environmental planning and decision-making processes. A legal notice announcing the availability of the EA and FONSI was also published on January 31st in the City of Corvallis’ *Corvallis Gazette Times*. A copy of the EA and FONSI was also made available for review at the Salem District Office, Marys Peak Resource Area Office, 1717 Fabry Road SE, Salem, Oregon 97306 and on the Internet at <http://www.or.blm.gov/salem/html/planning>.

F. Comments Received

No letters were received as a result of the public notices and letters sent out during initial scoping or during the EA/FONSI public comment period. Two comment letters were received outside of these periods, following the public notification of the Decision Record for Projects 1, 2, and 4. Responses to these comment letters were mailed directly to the interested party.

Consultation/Coordination:

The proposed action has been described in a programmatic Biological Assessment (BA) that has been used to facilitate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service), as required under Section 7(a) of the Endangered Species Act. The selected action will follow all applicable terms and conditions from the Biological Opinion BO# 1-7-2004-F-1113.

As directed in IB OR-2004-155, a Biological Assessment (BA) for project 3 was submitted to the NOAA Fisheries Level 1 team on June 13, 2005 for conferencing. This conferencing is required by Bureau policy (6840.06 B.1) for actions that may affect proposed fish species and/or proposed critical habitat. A letter of concurrence with the determination of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" to listed fish is expected to be received by the Salem District on or before July 13, 2005. Currently there are no listed fish species in the project area. Oregon Coast Coho are present in the project area and have been proposed for listing, with a determination of listing expected in June 2005. If Oregon Coast Coho are listed, the conference opinion may be converted into a letter of concurrence or Biological Opinion.

G. Conclusion

I have determined it is not necessary to change the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI –January 2005) for the School House Creek Restoration Project. The School House Creek Restoration Project EA fully covers the selected action. There are no significant new circumstances or facts relevant to environmental concerns about the selected alternative or its impacts, which were not addressed in the EA.

H. Implementation

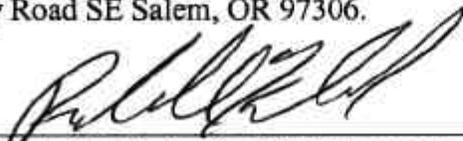
In accordance with Forest Management Regulations at 43 CFR 5003.2, the decision for this road project will not become effective or be open to formal protest until the Notice of Riparian Restoration Project is published "in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located". For this project, the Notice of Riparian Restoration Project will be published in the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* newspaper. Protests of this project must be filed within 15 days of the publication of the notice on June 14, 2005.

If no protests are filed, this decision will become effective and be implemented 15 days after the public notice of this Decision Record appears in the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* newspaper.

I. Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the appeal process, contact Amy Haynes (503-315-5955) or Gary Humbard (503-315-5981), Salem District Office, 1717 Fabry Road SE Salem, OR 97306.

Approved by:


Randy Gould, Acting Field Manager
Marys Peak Resource Area

Date

June 9, 2005