Revised South Fork Alsea Access Road Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement and Alsea Falls Park Enhancement Projects Finding of No Additional Significant Impact

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

Responsible Agency:	USDI - Bureau of Land Management
Responsible Official:	John Huston, Acting Field Manager Marys Peak Resource Area 1717 Fabry Road SE Salem, OR 97306 or (503) 315-5968
For further information, contact:	Gary Humbard, Project Lead Marys Peak Resource Area 1717 Fabry Road SE Salem, OR 97306 or (503) 315-5981

Abstract: This environmental assessment (EA) discloses the predicted environmental effects of two projects on federal land located in Township 14 South, Range 6 West, Section 31, Township 14 South, Range 7 West, Sections 21, 23, 25, 26 and 36; and Township 15 South, Range 6 West, Sections 5 and 6; Willamette Meridian and within the Upper Alsea River and Marys River Watersheds.

- Project 1 (Roadside Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement) is a proposal to remove immediate and potentially future hazard trees and reduce fuel loadings and fire hazard risk adjacent to a backcountry byway [South Fork Alsea Access Road (Rd. # 14-6-34.1)].

- Project 2 (Park Enhancement) is a proposal to remove hazard trees, enhance stand health in addition to providing a visually appealing and safe park for visitors within the Alsea Falls Recreation Site.

The actions would occur within Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), Riparian Reserve (RR) and Matrix Land Use Allocations (LUA).

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering economic use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interest of all people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

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FINDING OF NO ADDITIONAL SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published the *South Fork Alsea Access Road Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement and Alsea Falls Park Enhancement Environmental Assessment (*EA) (EA# OR080-07-03) in December of 2008. Comments received on the EA were reviewed and as a result, the BLM revised the *South Fork Alsea Access Road Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement and Alsea Falls Park Enhancement EA*. The *South Fork Alsea Access Road Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement and Alsea Falls Park Enhancement Revised EA* is attached to and incorporated by reference in this Finding of No Additional Significant Impact determination (FONASI). The analysis in this revised EA is site-specific and supplements analyses found in the *Salem District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement,* September 1994 (RMP/FEIS).

The proposed roadside hazard tree removal/roadside enhancement and park enhancement activities have been designed to conform to the *Salem District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan*, May 1995 (RMP) and related documents which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM lands within the Salem District (*EA Section 1.3*). Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service is described in Section 6.1 of the revised EA.

The projects are located within the Upper Alsea River and Marys River fifth-field watersheds. The projects are on BLM managed lands in Township 14 South, Range 6 West, Section 31, Township 14 South, Range 7 West, Sections 21, 23, 25, 26 and 36; Township 15 South, Range 6 West, Sections 5 and 6; Willamette Meridian.

The revised EA and FONASI were made available for public review from July 14, 2010 to July 29, 2010. The notice for public comment was published in a legal notice in the *Gazette Times* newspaper.

Finding of No Additional Significant Impact

Based upon review of the Revised South Fork Alsea Access Road Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement and Alsea Falls Park Enhancement EA and supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No site-specific environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, supplemental or additional information to the analysis done in the RMP/FEIS through a new environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following information:

Context: : Potential effects resulting from the implementation of the proposed action have been analyzed within the context of the Upper Alsea River and Marys River 5th-field Watersheds and the project area boundaries. The proposed action would occur on approximately 174 acres of LSR, RR and Matrix LUA land, encompassing less than 0.01 percent of the forest cover within the Upper Alsea River and less than 0.006 percent of the forest cover within the Marys River Watershed [40 CFR 1508.27(a)].

Intensity:

1. The resources potentially affected by the proposed thinning activities are: air quality, fire hazard/risk, fish species/habitat (except ESA listed species/habitat), invasive, non-native plant species, migratory birds, other special status species / habitat – wildlife, recreation, soils, threatened or endangered species – northern spotted owl, visual resources, water quality, and wildlife habitat components. The effects of hazard tree removal and density management are unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on these resources [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)] for the following reasons:

   - *Project design features* described in *(EA section 2.3.1)* would reduce the risk of effects to affected resources to be within RMP standards and guidelines and to be within the effects described in the RMP/EIS.

   - *Vegetation and Forest Stand Characteristics (EA section 3.1.2):* No special status vascular plant species or bryophytes would be affected.

     Noxious Weeds - While the number of plants may increase in the short term, any increase that does occur should be short lived because all areas with ground disturbing activities would be grass seeded with Oregon Certified (blue tagged) red fescue (*Festuca rubra*) at a rate equal to 40 pounds per acre or sown/planted with other native species as approved by the resource area botanist. Implementation of the Marys Peak integrated non-native plant management plan allows for early detection of non-native plant species which allows for rapid control and generally these species often persist for several years after timber harvest but soon decline as native vegetation increases within the project areas. In addition, all road construction and road maintenance areas would be monitored for Scot's broom infestations and eradicated. Other species would be eradicated as funding allows. No significant increase in populations of the noxious weed (invasive/non-native) species identified during the field surveys is expected to occur.

     Stands proposed for harvest activities are not presently functioning as late-successional old growth habitat.

     Carbon Sequestration (Storage) and Climate Change (EA section 3.1.8)

     The South Fork Alsea Access Road Hazard Tree Removal/Roadside Enhancement EA (OR-080-07-03) (EA) tiered to the PRMP FEIS (1994) which concluded that all alternatives analyzed in the FEIS, in their entirety including all timber harvest, would have only slight (context indicates that the effect would be too small to calculate) affect on CO2 levels.

     The following show quantities of carbon in forest ecosystem vegetation[1] in the Coast Range, and in the project area.

     - Total carbon, forest ecosystem vegetation, Pacific northwest, Coast Range 1.8-2 Giga-tonnes (Gt) (Hudiburg, et al. 2009).
     - Total carbon, forest ecosystem vegetation, South Fork Alsea River Hazard Tree Removal and Park Enhancement Project stands = 5,81*0* tonnes or 0.0001676 Gt. This represents *.001%* of the Coast Range total.
     - The annual carbon accumulation from forest management in the United States is 191 million tonnes. Current management on BLM-managed lands in western Oregon

[1] Carbon contained in both above ground and below ground parts of trees and forest vegetation, and downed wood, litter and duff. It does not include mineral carbon in soil, nor fossil fuels.

would result in an average annual accumulation of 1.69 million tonnes over the next 100 years, or 0.9% of the current U.S. accumulation. (WOPR, p. 4-537).

Carbon emissions resulting from the proposed action would total 223 tonnes. Current global emissions of carbon dioxide total 25 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (IPCC 2007, p. 513), and current U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide total 6 billion tonnes (EPA 2007, p 2-3). Therefore, the emissions from the proposed action would constitute .000000009% of current global emissions and .00000004% of current U.S. emissions.

Tree growth following harvest would offset greenhouse gases and result in net storage of 89 tonnes of carbon. The WOPR EIS (p. 4-538), which is incorporated here by reference, states that by 2106, the No Action Alternative (management under the 1995 RMP) would result in a total carbon storage of approximately 628 million tonnes, 9% higher than average historic conditions (576 million tonnes, WOPR, 3-224, as reanalyzed in November 6, 2009 memo, on file, Marys Peak Resource Area). The incremental effect of the proposed action, over time, would be net storage of carbon.

With the implementation of the project design features described in EA section 2.3.1, potential effects to the affected elements of the environment are anticipated to be site-specific and/or not measurable (i.e. undetectable over the watershed, downstream, and/or outside of the project areas). The project is designed to meet RMP standard and guidelines, modified by subsequent direction (EA section 1.3); and the effects of these project would not exceed those effects described in the RMP/FEIS [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1), EA sections 3.1].

- *Hydrology; Beneficial Uses, Fisheries and Aquatic Habitat; and Soils (EA sections 3.1.3 to 31.5)*:

The creation of yarding corridors and the mechanical removal of trees are unlikely to significantly increase sedimentation into project area streams because harvest generated slash would be maintained in the yarding corridors minimizing the need for machines to travel on bare soil. Also, ground-based equipment would only be allowed on slopes less than 35 percent. Ground-based skidding would occur during periods of low soil moisture with little or no rainfall, in order to minimize soil compaction and erosion.

Tree removal is not proposed on steep, unstable slopes where the potential for mass wasting adjacent to streams is high. Therefore, increases in sediment delivery to streams due to harvest activities and mass wasting are unlikely to result from this action. In addition, SPZs in riparian areas have high surface roughness, which can function to trap any overland flow and sediment before reaching streams. For the protection of stream channels and aquatic resources, riparian buffers or no-treatment zones were applied to all stream channels and "high water table areas" (small wet areas, ponds, marshes, etc.) in the project area (EA section 3.1.3.2).

Since the project areas are located below the elevation zone normally subject to transient snow accumulations in the winter, the small reduction in stand density is unlikely to result in any increase in snow accumulation and melting during ROS events. The project acres shown below reflect that 0.1 percent of the Upper Alsea River and 0.006 percent of the Marys River Watershed would be impacted. In reality only a small portion of each area in the Alsea Falls Park and along the roads would have activities. This would lead to a smaller impact than the

0.1 percent level in the South Fork Alsea River Watershed and would not be measurable in either of the watersheds. Therefore, this proposal is unlikely to result in any detectable changes in peak flows.

Retention of the SPZ buffer and the location of treatments primarily adjacent to intermittent channels would be expected to maintain the existing stream temperature regimes. The proposed action is unlikely to increase in-stream temperatures at the site (Wegner 2007). Based on the shade sufficiency analysis, the hydrology report water quality analysis and the project design features, the proposed action is unlikely to affect fish habitat downstream.

Soils: (EA section 3.1.4). Approximately 70 percent of the activity in this proposal would be carried out from the existing roadways in the project areas. The effects to soils on those areas away from the road surfaces would be limited to tracked machinery (harvester/forwarder) and this equipment would operate on dry soils with some slash component which would result in no measurable increase in soil compaction. The felling of trees as scattered individuals would have no visible or detectable effect on soil physical properties such as bulk density.

Special Status Species: (EA section 3.1.1). These projects would not directly affect any SS vascular plant, lichen, bryophyte or fungi species since there are no known sites within the project area or adjacent to the project. However, thinning dense stands would provide habitat for SS botanical and fungal species known from forests with larger diameter trees at an earlier age since thinning dense stands can allow for increased secondary conifer growth and allow for the development of the understory and shrub species.

These projects could affect any SS species that are not practical to survey for and known sites were not located during subsequent surveys. These species would mainly include SS hypogeous fungi species. However, the majority of these species have no known sites within the Marys Peak Resource Area or the Northern Oregon Coast Range Mountains.

Wildlife (*EA section 3.1.6*): The hazard tree removal and park enhancement treatments would maintain the functionality of the mid-seral forests within this landscape. There would be no discernable change in landscape conditions, since only about 174 acres would be affected in several small treatment units that are scattered across several parcels of BLM managed lands within these watersheds. No special habitats would be affected by Project 1 or Project 2. There would be no anticipated disturbance to spotted owls since there are no known nest sites within 0.25 miles of the proposed units in Project 1 and Project 2. The proposed action (Project 1 and 2) would not affect marbled murrelet suitable habitat nor designated critical habitat. The effects to riparian associated wildlife species is likely to be negligible since forest habitat conditions would be maintained and since the treatment units are very small and scattered across several BLM managed parcels.

Air Quality and Fire Hazard/Risk (EA section 3.1.7): Fuel loading, risk of a fire start and the resistance to control a fire, would all increase to a small degree at the sites. Slash created from timber harvest would add an estimated 1 to 5 tons per acre of dead fuel to the areas where selected hazard trees are cut.

Risk of a fire start in the untreated slash would be greatest during the first season following cutting, - the period when needles dry out but remain attached. These highly flammable “red needles” generally fall off within one year and risk of a fire start greatly diminishes. Fire risk would continue to diminish as the area "greens up" with under story vegetation, and as the fine twigs and branches in the slash begin to break off and collect on the soil surface.

The total amount of slash debris expected to be piled for burning is estimated to be less than 100 tons from the treated areas along the road. Burning less than 100 tons of dry, cured, piled fuels under favorable atmospheric conditions in the Oregon Coast Range is not expected to result in any long-term negative effects to air quality in the air shed. Burning of slash would be coordinated with Oregon Department of Forestry in accordance with the Oregon State Smoke Management Plan which serves to coordinate all forest burning activities on a regional scale to prevent cumulative negative impacts to local and regional air sheds.

Visual Resources and Recreation (EA section 3.1.2): Removing a portion of trees within 100 feet of the Byway would reduce the hazard and potentially increase the sight distance in areas where trees are dense. Recreational use of the project areas would be restricted in the short-term during operations. The long-term seasonal operation of facilities at Alsea Falls Recreation Area of early May to September 30 would not change and year round foot and bicycle access would continue on trails. A recreational forest setting would remain.

The removal of some trees would have a minimal impact to the quality of the whole viewshed. Visitors would notice overall management of the trees and disturbance to vegetation, increased sight distance, and experience safer driving conditions. Chipping slash would contribute to a visually pleasing park setting and keep the recreation site managed as a fire suppression and fuels management area, reducing fire hazards and protecting investments. Timber management at Alsea Falls Recreation Site would allow the desired regeneration of the forest canopy by removing hazardous or suppressed trees so the remaining trees can thrive.

Public health or safety [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)]: The project's effects to public health and safety would not be significant because: Public safety along haul routes would be minimally affected because log truck traffic from forest management activities on both private and public land is common and because project design features such as speed limits and warning signs near logging activities would provide for public safety.

2. The proposed thinning activities:
   - *a. Would not affect*
     - (1) unique characteristics of the geographic area [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)] - There are no parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, or ecologically critical areas located within the project area (*EA Section 3.1, Table 3);*
     - (2) districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would the Proposed Action cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)] (*EA Section 3.1, Table 3).*
   - b. *Are not unique or unusual.* The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without highly controversial [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)], highly uncertain, or unique or unknown risks [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)].
   - c. *Do not set a precedent* for future actions that may have significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (6)].
   - d. *Are not expected to adversely affect Endangered or Threatened Species* listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (9)].

ESA Wildlife - Northern spotted owl (EA Section 3.1.6):.There would be no anticipated disturbance to spotted owls since there are no known nest sites within 0.25 miles of the proposed units in Project 1 and Project 2. Over the years of spotted owl monitoring, owls have been detected foraging within 0.25 miles of the proposed hazard tree units in Section 21, 23, and 26. But neither Project 1 nor 2 would affect the suitable habitat conditions available for

spotted owls in this area. Projects 1 and 2 would slightly alter but maintain the dispersal habitat quality of the mid-seral stands that are treated. About 110 acres of this dispersal habitat lies within OMOCA-36. The proposed action is considered a may affect, but not likely adverse affect to this designated critical habitat.

Marbled Murrelet
The proposed action (Project 1 and 2) would not affect marbled murrelet suitable habitat nor designated critical habitat. Some of the proposed treatment units in Project 1 lie within 0.25 mile of unsurveyed suitable habitat for murrelets. However, no noise disturbance is anticipated since the proposed action would be restricted to occur outside of the marbled murrelet critical nesting season.

ESA Fish – Project 1
The proposed action, with the incorporation of project design features, is considered a "may affect" to ESA listed OC Coho Salmon for hazard tree removal from stream protection zones within 1 mile of listed fish habitat or within 150 feet of listed fish habitat. A 'may affect' determination indicates consultation with NMFS for this project is required. The proposed project would comply with project design features as described under the programmatic Biologic Opinion resulting from the *Biological Assessment for Programmatic Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Activities in Northwest Oregon* (May 2, 2008). Actions and effects beyond the scope of the NMFS programmatic consultation would require additional consultation with NMFS.

Project 2
The proposed action, with the incorporation of project design features, is considered a "may affect" to ESA listed OC Coho Salmon. A 'may affect' determination indicates consultation with NMFS for this project is required. Compliance of the thinning project with guidance described in *Endangered Species Act Section 7 Informal Consultation for the 2008-2009 North Coast Province Thinning Timber Sales Programmatic on Portions of the Siuslaw National Forest and Eugene and Salem Districts of the Bureau of Land Management, Seven Watersheds within the Oregon Coast Recovery Domain* (NMFS 2008) would provide consultation coverage for the May Affect actions of the Alsea Falls Park Enhancement thinning activities.

Actions and effects beyond the scope of the programmatic consultation would require additional consultation with NMFS.

Protection of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), as described by the Magnuson/Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, and consultation with NMFS is required for all projects which may adversely affect EFH of Chinook or coho salmon in the action area. The South Fork Alsea River is considered EFH to Alsea Falls.

e. *Do not violate any known Federal, State, or local law* or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (10)] (*EA Section 1.3*).

(1) The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) evaluated the project area in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (7)] and determined that there is not a potential for cumulative effects on the affected resources (*EA Section 4.0*).

Approved by: _____ 8/9/2010
John Huston, Date
Marys Peak Resource Area Acting Field Manager