

**For More Information**

Check out the Southwest Oregon Fire Recovery project Web site. The site contains maps and other information related to Medford and Roseburg Districts' post-fire recovery efforts.

<http://www.blm.gov/or/fire/recovery.php>

**Questions or Comments? Contact Us!**

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# Rabbit Mountain Late Successional Reserve Restoration Environmental Assessment

Dear Reader,

In the early morning hours of July 26, 2013, a dry thunderstorm ignited numerous fires in southwest Douglas County and northern Josephine County, Oregon. Three of these fires formed what was known as the Douglas Complex; the Rabbit Mountain, Dad's Creek and Farmer Gulch fires, which burned 23,984; 24,439; and 248 acres, respectively. A total of 48,671 acres burned on federal and private forest lands, 6,266 acres of which were on lands administered by the South River Field Office, Roseburg District BLM.

The Cow Creek Backcountry Byway passes through the burned area, as does a railroad right-of-way and several major collector roads that provide access for forest management on the affected lands. Also present within the burned area are three large quarries at Rabbit Mountain, Hare Creek, and Quartzite Creek that are the primary sources in the watershed for aggregate for road construction and resurfacing of existing roads.

Burn severity within the Rabbit Mountain fire perimeter ranged from low to high with varying degrees of mortality in stands, young and old, in proximity to the quarries and roads described above. In many instances, this has led to circumstances where the safe use of the facilities by the BLM, private landowners, and the general public could be compromised.

**Project Location:**

The project area is within the Union Creek-Cow Creek, Middle Creek, Bear Creek-West Fork Cow Creek, and Riffle Creek-Cow Creek sub-watersheds. All proposed treatment areas are located on BLM-administered land with the Late Successional Reserve (LSR) land use allocation. BLM lands are intermixed with private lands, creating a mosaic of ownership patterns

**Purpose and Need:**

The following pages contain information relating to the Purpose and Need portion of the Environmental Assessment. Management of BLM-administered lands and resources in the project area is subject to the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, and Clean Water Act as discussed in the Roseburg District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (USDI/BLM 1995 (ROD/RMP, p.15)). This Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and related Council on Environmental Quality regulations.



**Current Facts and Direction:**

Approximately 6,300 acres of late-successional reserve lands were burned in the Rabbit Mountain Fire portion of the Douglas Complex fires. Nearly 1,940 acres of late seral forests (80 years or older) burned at moderate and high severity.

Fire recovery activities within the late-successional reserve areas will focus on:

- Protecting and enhancing conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems, which serve as habitat for late-successional and old-growth forest related species including the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet;
- Maintaining a functional, interacting, late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystem;
- Continue to respond to right-of-way permittees in addressing danger trees as needed or requested; and
- Provide for safe use and management of these forests.

The Roseburg District started the environmental analysis process for these projects in February 2014.

The Rabbit Mountain Fire Late-Successional Reserve Recovery Environmental Assessment will analyze actions to address safety along major roads and infrastructure; hazards caused by fuel loading; and habitat restoration in northern spotted owl home ranges affected by the fire. Approximately 250 acres of young plantations (less than 50 years old) that burned at moderate and high severity within the late-successional reserve have been planted with a mix of conifer species. The remaining stands will be evaluated for planting while considering the potential for natural regeneration, planting an appropriate mix of seedling species, and spatial diversity.



Ferns regrow within the Douglas Complex

Proposed Projects within the EA:

- Roadside Safety Treatments – Approximately 12.6 miles
- Planting of Older Forests – Estimated 414 acres
- Planting – Estimated 732 acres. 246 acres planted in 2014 with 486 acres remaining
- Roadside Fuels treatment – Estimated 138 acres

The Rabbit Mountain Fire Late-Successional Reserve Recovery EA is anticipated to be out for public review in September, 2014.



Of the 2,671 acres of moderate and high severity acres burned in the Rabbit Mountain Fire within the South River Resource Area, 1,642 have been identified for potential silvicultural habitat restoration treatments (246 of the identified acres were planted in 2014). Restoring Late-Successional Reserve habitat within the potential silvicultural treatment areas would allow the South River Resource Area to address the following needs.

- There is a need to restore and maintain sufficient northern spotted owl habitat to address the threats from a loss of habitat due to stand replacing fire (Forsman et al. 2011; USFWS 2011, p. vii).
- There is a need to conserve and restore habitat elements that take a long time to develop (e.g. large trees, medium and large snags, downed wood) during post-fire silvicultural activities (USFWS 2011, p. III-49).

**Road Decommissioning**

Within the Rabbit Mountain Fire Recovery project area, 3.0 miles of roads have been identified for proposed decommissioning. Decommissioning roads within the project area would allow the South River Resource Area to address the following needs.

- There is a need to keep roads to the minimum needed for management (ROD/RMP, p. 74).
- There is a need to reclaim a road when it is no longer required for mineral or land management activities (ROD/RMP, p. 66).
- Unless a road is needed for continued resource management, there is a need to use a temporary road and put it to bed after use, using methods such as blocking, ripping, seeding, mulching, fertilizing, and water-barring (ROD/RMP, p. 133).



Planting on Rabbit Mountain.

tional Safety and Health Administration (Oregon OSHA), US Forest Service, BLM and Associated Oregon Loggers gives guidance on hazard tree identification and treatment area identification (Toupin et al. 2008). The Guidelines for selecting fire-injured trees that are likely to be infested by insects in Southwest Oregon forests (SWOFIDSC, 2001) uses objective and quantifiable criteria for identifying individual trees likely to die within five years post-fire.



There is a need for safe access to and working conditions around quarry operations.

- There is also a need for the proposed action to reduce long-term maintenance and repair costs to BLM roads from dead trees falling onto and damaging roadways and the related infrastructure.

**Fire Planning**

Roadside fuels reduction would occur within roadside safety treatment areas, accounting for up to 138 acres. Reducing hazardous fuels along priority roads would allow the South River Resource Area to address the following needs:

- There is a need for BLM to eliminate safety hazards, reduce fuel loading, and provide access to manage future wildfires.
- There is a need to clear hazardous fuels along escape routes within the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) area (CWPP 2011, App. B, p. 12). In the event of a fire, South Douglas County communities would utilize the evacuation routes that have been identified in the CWPP. Cow Creek Road is identified as an escape route.
- There is a need to protect and support land allocation objectives by lowering the risk of high intensity, stand replacing wildfires (ROD/RMP, p. 78).
- There is a need to use minimum impact suppression methods for fuels management in accordance with guidelines for reducing risks of large scale disturbances (ROD/RMP, p. 31).
- There is a need to improve the ability to limit the size of all wildfires (ROD/RMP, p. 27) through maintaining access along roadways.

**Habitat Restoration**



## The Purpose:

### Roadside, Railroad Right-of-Way, and Quarry Safety

Create a safe environment by felling and removing hazard trees, above and below roads and railroad right-of-ways, and adjacent to the quarries described above, that were killed by the Rabbit Mountain Fire, and those trees judged likely to die in the next three to five years as a consequence of injuries sustained in the fire, as determined by an objective set of standards related to percent of crown scorch, percent of bole circumference with cambium damage, and height of charred, spongy bark.

Specific ROD/RMP management direction provides for:

- Removing snags and logs to reduce hazards to humans along roads and trails and in or adjacent to recreation sites (ROD/RMP, p. 30).
- Removing hazard trees along utility right-of-way and in other developed areas (ROD/RMP, p. 70).
- Removing trees along rights-of way if they are a hazard to public safety. (ROD/RMP, p. 30 and 73).
- Managing Back Country Byways according to policy and objectives contained in BLM Manual 8357 (ROD/RMP, p. 58).
- Identify and evaluate safety problems that occur along byways (BLM Manual 8357, IV-1).

### Fire Planning

Provide access to manage future wildfires by maintaining the ingress/egress onto BLM lands through roadside hazard tree removal and fuels reduction. Specific ROD/RMP management direction provides for:

- Reducing hazards through methods such as prescribed burning, mechanical or manual manipulation of forest vegetation and debris, removal of forest vegetation and debris and combinations of these methods (ROD/RMP, p. 78).
- Modifying fuel profiles in order to lower the potential of fire ignition and rate of spread (ROD/RMP, p. 78).

### Habitat Restoration

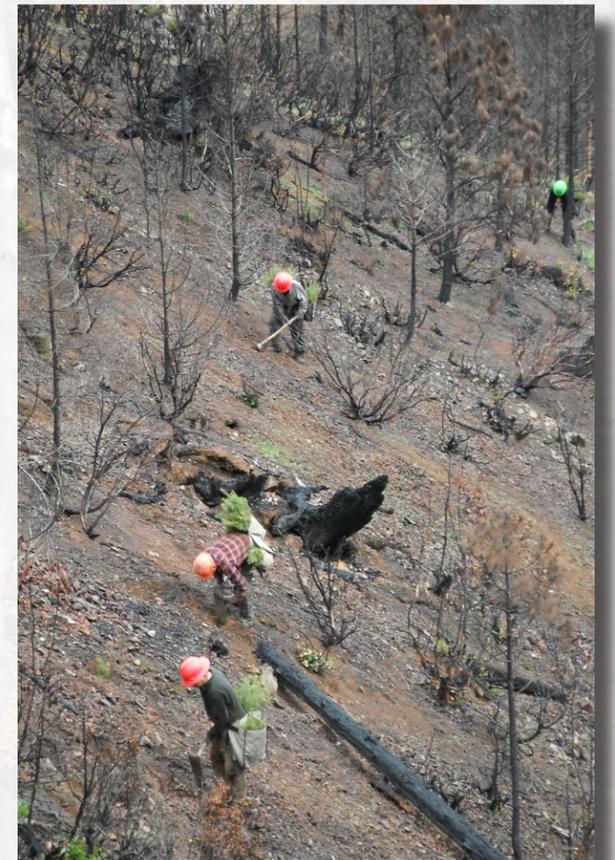
Initiate stand development on a trajectory to attain late-successional habitat characteristics through (1) accelerating stand initiation phase; (2) restoring historical tree species composition through planting of minor tree species to comple-

## The Need

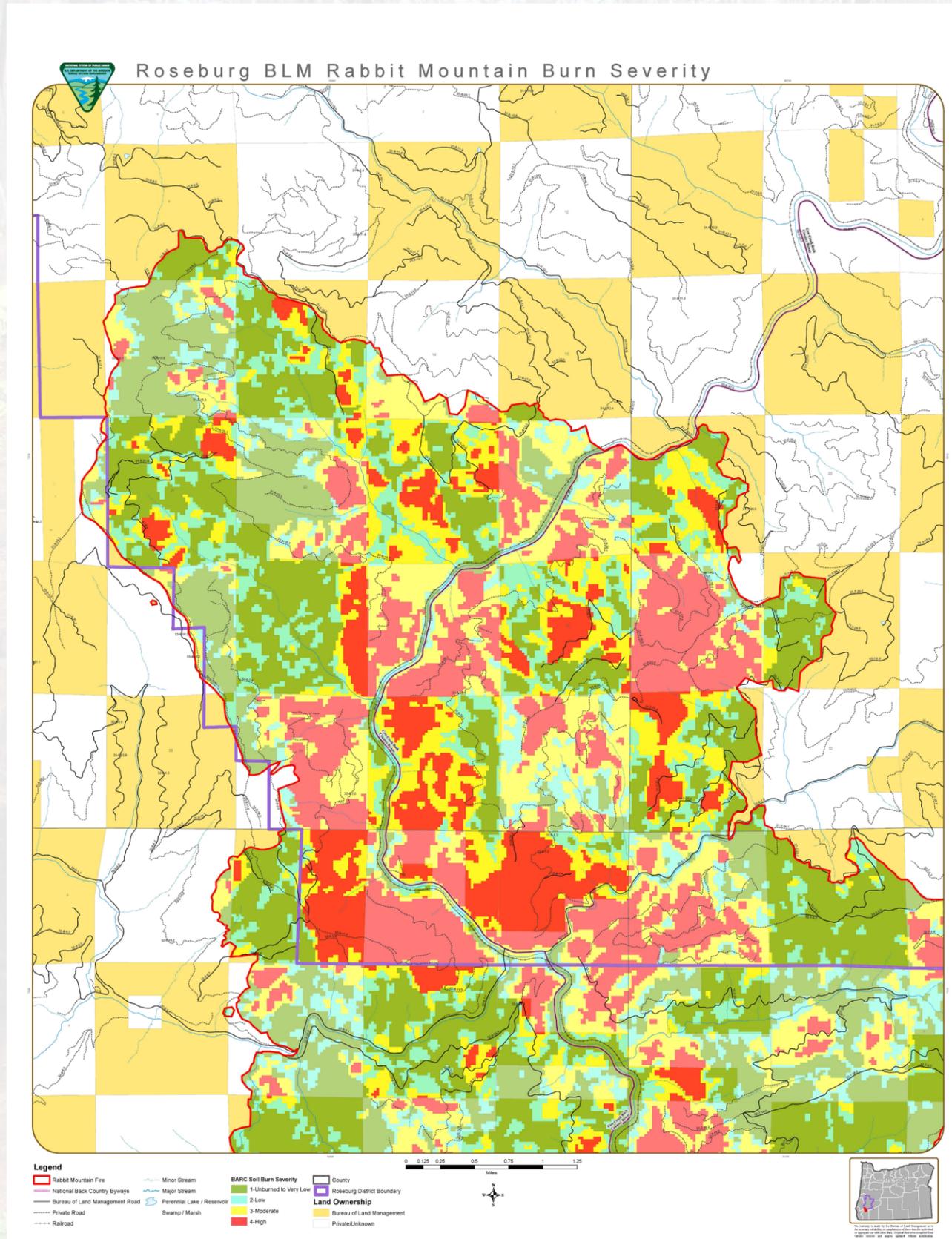
### Roadside, Railroad Right-of-Way, and Quarry Safety

The Rabbit Mountain Fire burned approximately 2,671 acres under moderate to high severity in the LSR within the South River Resource Area. Of those acres, 403 have been identified for potential roadside safety treatments based on fire severity, slope, road use (current and projected), and road classification. Railroad right-of-way safety treatment areas were selected based on fire severity and slope, and total approximately 11 acres. Potential quarry safety treatment areas surrounding three active quarries within the fire perimeter account for approximately 21 acres. Falling hazard trees within the potential roadside, railroad right-of-way, and quarry safety treatment areas would allow the South River Resource Area to address the following needs:

- There is a need to provide safe travel conditions for members of the public who engage in dispersed recreational activities, gather special forest products, hunt or travel through the burned area.
- There is a need to create a safe environment within the burned area which allows for maintaining the integrity of the existing rail line and the safety of personnel and equipment that transport cargo over it.
- There is a need to provide safe travel conditions for BLM employees, agents and contractors, and the employees and contractors of private timber companies engaged in the rehabilitation and reforestation of the burned area, and for holders of reciprocal rights-of-way who may transport timber or mineral materials through the burned area.
- There is a need for BLM to comply with federal and state requirements for identifying and removing hazard trees. The 2008 Field Guide for Danger Trees Identification and Response by Oregon Occupa-



Planting taking place on units burned during the Douglas Complex.



ment the natural seeding of Douglas-fir; (3) maintaining the natural component of fire-created snags and downed wood; (4) creating landscape diversity through treatment of portions of the landscape. Specific ROD/RMP management direction provides for:

- Planning and implementing silvicultural treatments, inside Late-Successional Reserves, that are beneficial to the creation of late-successional habitat (ROD/RMP, p. 29).
- Designing projects to improve conditions for wildlife if they provide late-successional habitat benefits or if their effect on late-successional associated species is negligible (ROD/RMP, p. 38).
- Specific guidance from the Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl (2011) suggests:

With respect to the dry forest landscapes, structural legacies include... snags and downed wood that were created as a result of the disturbance event. Structural legacies serve valuable functions such as reproductive structures that facilitate plant propagation, modifying microclimates, or improving con-



Area considered for treatment to address safety.



nectivity through the disturbed area (Franklin et al. 2007, USFWS 2011, p. III-33).

Retaining and restoring key structural components, including large and old trees, large snags, and downed logs (USFWS 2011, p. III-34).

Recovery Action 12: In lands where management is focused on development of spotted owl

habitat, post-fire silvicultural activities should concentrate on conserving and restoring habitat elements that take a long time to develop (e.g., large trees, medium and large snags, downed wood) (USFWS 2011, p. III-49).

### Road Decommissioning

Restore site productivity to roads no longer needed (ROD/RMP, p. 138) through reclamation of these roads.

Proposed fire recovery treatments in the Late Successional Reserve land use allocation within the Rabbit Mountain Fire Recovery project area, South River Resource Area, Roseburg BLM.

Proposed Activities within the Late Successional Reserve LUA		*Gross Area (acres)
Hazard tree safety treatments	Roadside safety	403 (12.6 miles)
	Railroad right-of-way safety	11 (0.5 miles)
	Quarry safety	21
Roadside fuels reduction	Machine piles	60
	Hand piles	138
Habitat restoration	Young forest planting (< 50 years)	486
	Old forest planting (> 50 years)	414
	Roadside safety planting	403
Road decommissioning		3.0 miles

\*Gross areas are approximations based on post-fire aerial photo analysis, soil and vegetation burn severity models, and subsequent ground reconnaissance. Gross areas may change as additional information and further field review refines the approximations.

