

Deschutes & Ochoco National Forests

Crooked River National Grassland

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Crook County, Oregon

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SCHEDULE OF PROJECTS

PROJECT INFORMATION

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PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS

Decision to be Implemented

► **Links**

► **Evaluate Our Service**

We welcome your comments on our service and your suggestions for improvement.

Forest

Deschutes National Forest

1001 SW Emkay Drive
Bend, OR 97702

(541) 383-5300

Ochoco National Forest

3160 N.E. 3rd Street
Prineville, OR 97754

(541) 416-6500

Crooked River National Grassland

813 S.W. Hwy. 97
Madras, OR 97741

(541) 475-9272



DECISION AND RATIONALE

I have decided to thin small conifer trees in 14 aspen stands for a total of approximately 100 acres. These stands are located in the Maury Mountains within 40 to 60 miles southeast of the City of Prineville. The legal locations for these plantations are within Townships 17 and 18 South, Ranges 18, 19, and 20 East, Willamette Meridian. A map of the proposed thinning units is located in the project file.

The primary objective of the proposed treatment is to thin conifer trees in aspen stands to enhance the growth and vigor of the aspen. The sites included in this project have an abundance of small diameter conifer trees that have potential to reduce the vigor of aspen clones through competition for light and water. Thinning will maintain a vigorous understory of grasses, forbs, and shrubs including aspen. Slash resulting from felled trees would be arranged to provide protection to aspen sprouts or streambanks, and/or scattered.

The treatment includes thinning trees up to 12 inches dbh (diameter at breast height). There would be some variation in thinning based on the existing trees in the stands. Generally, all conifer trees up to 9 inches dbh would be felled within 20 to 50 feet of existing live aspen stems or sprouts. Beyond that distance, conifer trees would be thinned to an average spacing of 18-by-18 foot up to 100 feet (200 feet on east side of stand 9) beyond the last live aspen. In stand 11, up to four fir trees (12 to 18 inches dbh) would be girdled to reduce competition with comparable trees in tightly spaced groups of trees and to provide snag habitat for wildlife. Some small trees (12 inches or less) will be retained along stream edges to ensure streambank stability and shade. The trees that are selected to remain in each thinning unit will vary based on the existing trees on the site.

This project does not include any road construction activities or the use of herbicides.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement when they are within one of the categories identified in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30. This proposal falls within a category of actions identified in FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30, Section 31.2(6). Category 6 describes timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because the analysis indicates that there are no significant effects to

extraordinary circumstances associated with this project. In determining the appropriateness of using the categorical exclusion, a determination of the potential impact to the identified resource conditions identified in FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3(2) was made. I find that no extraordinary circumstances exist with the proposed project activities that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

I considered the following resource conditions in making my determination that extraordinary circumstances related to the project did not warrant further analysis or documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.

Federally listed threatened or endangered species, designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing, proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species

Biological evaluations were prepared for wildlife, aquatic, and botany species. This section summarizes the information and analysis contained in the biological evaluations for this thinning project. The three biological evaluations are contained in the project file. This section has been divided into federally listed species and Forest Service sensitive species.

Federally listed species

There are three federally listed species known or suspected to occur on the Ochoco National Forest. These species are northern bald eagle, bull trout, and mid-Columbia River steelhead trout. This thinning project would have no effect on any of these species.

There would be no effect to mid-Columbia River steelhead trout, or to bull trout, because there is no habitat for these species within the project area. Refer to the October 14, 2004, BE for aquatic species for more information.

There would be no effect to bald eagles because there are no known nest sites, roost sites, or foraging areas within the project area. The project area does not contain any Bald Eagle Management Areas or identified essential habitats. Refer to the November 10, 2004, BE for wildlife species for more information.

Forest Service Sensitive Species

There are 8 wildlife, 5 aquatic, and 28 botanical sensitive species known or suspected to occur on the Ochoco National Forest. This

thinning project would have no impact on 5 terrestrial, 3 aquatic, and 19 botanical species because there is no suitable habitat in the project area (see wildlife, aquatic, or botany BEs for more information).

Wildlife Species: The project area contains potential habitat for three sensitive wildlife species (California wolverine, gray flycatcher, and peregrine falcon). A determination of "may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species" (MIIH) was reached for California wolverine because there is a slight chance that individuals could be affected, but the project area does not contain any denning habitat for wolverines and wolverines moving through the area would be able to avoid proposed activities. A determination of MIIH was reached for gray flycatcher because individuals could be affected, but the project should not change the level of use of habitat in these areas by this species. A determination of MIIH was reached for peregrine falcon because individuals could be affected, but they are not known to occupy the project area and individuals would be able to avoid project activities.

Aquatic Species: The project area contains potential habitat for two sensitive aquatic species (redband trout and Columbia spotted frog). A determination of MIIH was reached for redband trout because key habitat features will not be affected by project activities. The project would not measurably reduce stream shade and it maintains bank stability. This project is unlikely to result in sediment entering streams because all work would be completed by hand (no ground-based machinery). However, a heavy rain event could mobilize some sediment. Resultant turbidity is expected to be short term and settled out within a few hours after a storm event. A determination of MIIH was reached for Columbia spotted frogs because during migrations between wet areas and upland habitat, there is a potential of loss or injury to spotted frogs when trees are being felled. However, felling small diameter trees would not affect breeding and rearing activities.

Mid-Columbia spring chinook salmon essential fish habitat (EFH) has been identified within the project area, although dams have blocked access by chinook salmon. A determination of "no impact" was reached for Mid-Columbia spring chinook salmon EFH because the project will not affect key aquatic habitat features.

Plant species: Two sensitive plant species, Peck's mariposa lily (*Calochortus longebarbatus* var. *peckii*) and interior sedge (*Carex interior*), have been documented in the Maury Mountains. The project area contains potential habitat for 11 sensitive plants. These species are the two listed above and the following: ascending moonwort (*Botrychium ascendens*), crenulate moonwort (*Botrychium crenulatum*), Mingan's moonwort (*Botrychium minganense*), mountain moonwort (*Botrychium montanum*), twin-spike moonwort (*Botrychium paradoxum*), pinnate moonwort (*Botrychium pinnatum*), Back's sedge (*Carex backii*), silverskin lichen (*Dermatocarpon*

luridum), and margined streamside moss (*Scouleria marginata*). A determination of MIIH was reached for nine of these species. Project activities may affect potential habitat by covering small areas with slash, but project activities are not ground-disturbing and would not affect the viability of these species. A determination of "no impact" was reached for the last two species listed above because the project is not expected to affect water quality. Refer to the June 15, 2005, Botany Report for more information.

Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

There are no anticipated effects to wetlands or floodplains. Thinning treatments within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) have been designed to maintain bank stability. The project would not result in any measurable effects to overland flow, soil erosion, infiltration rates, shade, bank stability, or streamflow. The project has been field reviewed by the district Fisheries Biologist and Hydrologist, and trees that are needed to maintain riparian stability and stream shade have been marked for retention.

This project would not affect municipal watersheds because there are no municipal watersheds within any of the areas proposed for thinning.

Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas

There are no congressionally designated areas within any of the sites proposed for thinning.

Inventoried roadless areas

There are no inventoried roadless areas (RARE II or Forest Plan) within any of the areas proposed for thinning (LRMP FEIS, Appendix C).

Research natural areas

There are no existing or proposed Research Natural Areas within any of the areas proposed for thinning (LRMP FEIS, p. 3-20).

American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas

Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this project. The project was designed to avoid impacts to known heritage sites. Where sites are present, treatments

have been designed to ensure protection. Based on known cultural sites and proposed treatments, this project has no effect on heritage sites and the qualities that make them eligible to the National Register of Historic Places.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This aspen restoration project was listed in the Schedule of Projects for the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests since the January 2005 issue. On May 11, 2005, the proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping. Thirty-one individuals, organizations, and agencies were contacted (see project file for list of contacts).

One e-mail was received in response to public involvement efforts. This e-mail is contained in the project file. Several questions were raised about the project. These questions, with a brief response, follow:

1. Will any new road be built? No, this project does not propose to construct any roads.
2. Will precommercial thinning be accomplished by hand or mechanized equipment? Will any trees be sold commercially? The thinning will be accomplished using chainsaws or other hand tools such as hand saws and loppers. Trees will not be sold commercially.
3. How many trees will be removed? The number of trees to be removed varies by stand. In some stands the majority of the trees to be removed are saplings (less than 5 inches dbh) occurring in dense patches. In other cases the trees are small poles (5-9 inches dbh) with variable density. The outcome of the project will be a conifer tree spacing of approximately 18 feet by 18 feet on the average within treated areas. Where aspen sprouts are present, the resulting conifer density will be less than 18-by-18 foot near aspen sprouts. Where live streams are present, the spacing may be closer in order to maintain stream shade.
4. What is the effect on wildlife, soil, and water? Each treatment site has been reviewed and measures incorporated into the site-specific prescription to maintain water quality, soil quality, and wildlife habitat. Aspen is an important habitat and activities will be done by hand. No ground-based equipment will be used and this project will not cause any detrimental soil conditions. The outcome of this project should be beneficial to wildlife and water.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAW

This decision is consistent with the Ochoco National Forest Land and

Resource Management Plan, as amended, (LRMP) as required by the National Forest Management Act. This aspen restoration project was designed in conformance with LRMP standards and guidelines. Project activities would not retard attainment of Riparian Management Objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION

This decision may be implemented immediately.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This action falls within a category of actions that is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.8).

CONTACT PERSON

For further information contact Dede Steele, at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District, 3160 NE Third Street, Prineville, Oregon, 97754 or at (541) 416-6500.

/s/ Arthur J. Currier 8/3/05

ARTHUR J. CURRIER Date

District Ranger

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