

# Deschutes & Ochoco National Forests Crooked River National Grassland

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## Projects & Plans

### Project Documents

## DECISION NOTICE and FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT for the Bandit II Environmental Assessment

**USDA Forest Service  
Ochoco National Forest  
Lookout Mountain Ranger District  
Crook and Wheeler Counties,  
Oregon**

### I. INTRODUCTION

An environmental assessment (EA) has been completed that describes an analysis of vegetation treatments (commercial timber harvest, precommercial thinning, prescribed fire) in the Marks Creek Watershed and Veazie Creek Subwatersheds, Lookout Mountain Ranger District, Ochoco National Forest. This EA is available for review at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District Office in Prineville, Oregon. The EA was prepared by an interdisciplinary team and is based on the needs to:

- a. move the landscape-level diversity of forest vegetation and associated wildlife habitat closer to that which

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- Deschutes SO
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- Crescent
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- Ochoco SO
- Lookout Mtn.
- Paulina
- Crooked River NG

✦ **Forest Health, Fire, Fuels, Vegetation Management**

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✦ **Land Acquisition**

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**PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS**

▶ **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



- occurred historically
- b. increase the abundance of single strata late and old structure (LOS) stands while maintaining the current overall amount of LOS (both multi and single strata combined), and maintain existing large trees while encouraging the development of additional large trees
- c. bring the area's fuels closer to levels expected under natural fire disturbance regimes and reduce the forest's susceptibility to moderate and high intensity fires.
- d. reduce the overall susceptibility of the landscape to large-scale infestation by insects and disease, by increasing the vigor and resistance to attack of forest stands
- e. enhance the vegetative conditions of hardwood communities
- f. improve shade producing vegetation and large woody material (LWM) recruitment in riparian zones.

**II. ALTERNATIVES**

Three action alternatives and a no action alternative were analyzed in detail in the EA. The action alternatives examine various combinations and degrees of activities in order to meet the purpose of and need for action. In addition to meeting the purpose of and need for action, two alternatives were developed to address concerns stated during the scoping process (EA, p. 11). Chapter 2 of the EA (pp. 30-51) contains a complete description of all four alternatives.

**Alternative 1** is the no action alternative. Under this alternative, activities analyzed in the Bandit II EA, including commercial timber harvest and other vegetation treatments, would not occur. Ongoing activities, such as road maintenance, treatment of noxious weeds, and recreation use, would continue. Access for public and administrative purposes would continue to be provided by the existing transportation system. Resource protection activities (such as road maintenance and fire suppression)

would continue.

**Alternative 2** was proposed to meet the purpose of and need for action as described in Chapter 1 of the EA prior to requesting any public input. Based on an analysis of the existing forest vegetation conditions within the project area, this alternative proposed commercial timber harvest (2,339 acres), precommercial thinning (5,395 acres), natural fuels underburning (5,198 acres), and hardwood enhancement (53 acres) activities. Road management includes 2.2 miles of new construction, 9.0 miles of reconstruction or surfacing, 1.2 miles of temporary construction, and 21.6 miles of inactivation and decommissioning. This alternative proposes commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning within the perimeter of the Hash Rock Fire (August 2000) and within the Bandit Springs Recreation Area.

**Alternative 3** was developed in response to public comments concerning a desire for restoration activities that did not include commercial timber harvest or road construction. This alternative was designed to meet the need for action and also address concerns expressed about post-fire salvage logging and commercial harvest within the Bandit Springs Recreation Area. This alternative includes precommercial thinning (4,281 acres), natural fuels underburning (5,427 acres), and hardwood enhancement (52 acres) activities. No road management activities are included. This alternative proposes precommercial thinning and natural and/or activity fuels underburning within the perimeter of the Hash Rock Fire and within the Bandit Springs Recreation Area.

**Alternative 4** was developed to meet the purpose of the need for action, while responding to public comments requesting that harvest not occur within the burned area and that the amount of commercial timber harvest was excessive within the Bandit Springs Recreation Area. Under this alternative no timber harvest would occur within

the Hash Rock Fire perimeter and the amount of harvest within the Bandit Springs Area is reduced. No new or temporary road construction would occur in the Hash Rock Fire perimeter or in the Bandit Springs Recreation Area. This alternative includes commercial timber harvest (1,945 acres), precommercial thinning (5,118 acres), natural fuels underburning (5,181 acres), and hardwood enhancement (53 acres) activities. Road management includes 2.2 miles of new construction, 8.5 miles of reconstruction or surfacing, 1.2 miles of temporary construction, and 21.6 miles of inactivation and decommissioning. This alternative proposes precommercial thinning and natural and/or activity fuels underburning within the perimeter of the Hash Rock Fire and within the Bandit Springs Recreation Area. Commercial harvest would occur within the Bandit Springs Area.

**Design Elements** common to all action alternatives are described on pages 40 - 48 of the EA. Many of the design elements for RHCAs and Water Quality/ fisheries are intended to meet the requirements set forth in the Forest Plan for protection of water quality in the State of Oregon through planning, application, and monitoring of Best Management Practices (BMPs). Equipment cleaning requirements and other design elements are included to minimize the introduction and spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds.

**Mitigation Measures** were developed to offset or lessen the effects of roads and commercial harvest activities proposed in Alternatives 2 and 4. These measures are described in the EA on page 40 and include measures to reduce sediment delivery to streams and road inactivation to maintain habitat quality in big game summer range. Table 2-7 on page 40 lists the 8.5 miles of currently open road that would be inactivated to maintain habitat quality.

### III. DECISION AND RATIONALE

Based on the analysis documented in the Bandit II EA, I have decided to select Alternative 4, for implementation.

Under the selected Alternative 4, commercial timber harvest, precommercial thinning, natural fuels underburning, and hardwood enhancement activities would occur in the Marks Creek Watershed and Veazie Creek Subwatershed. For a detailed discussion of the activities included in Alternative 4, refer to pages 30-34 and 38-48 of the EA.

I have reviewed the EA and have determined that there is adequate information to provide a reasoned choice of action. The analysis addresses the effects of the activities in sufficient detail to provide a reasoned choice among the alternatives. In making my decision, I considered information related to the purpose of and need for action, the key issues, and public comments. The following information describes the factors that I considered and my reasons for selecting Alternative 4.

### **Upland Vegetation**

The purpose and need includes moving toward conditions that are sustainable and provide habitat diversity. This means moving the landscape closer to the mix of vegetative conditions that existed historically, maintaining and enhancing stands dominated by Late and Old Structure (LOS) characteristics; especially stands of single-strata LOS, increasing the amount of forested area that would support a non-lethal fire regime, and decrease the amount of forested land that is highly susceptible to insects and disease. The Viable Ecosystem model was used to characterize the existing landscape and to provide a means of comparison to the Historical Range of Variability (HRV). The objectives for upland vegetation are addressed in Chapter 3 of the EA under Upland Vegetation, Late and Old Structure (LOS) Stands, Fire Ecology, and Natural

Disturbance Agents (Insects and Disease).

## 1. Landscape Diversity

The exclusion of fire as a disturbance agent, along with past harvest practices, has fostered changes in stand structure, species composition, and density. In general, today there is relatively more western juniper, Douglas-fir, and grand fir and less ponderosa pine and larch. Overall, stands dominated by large trees (21-inch dbh or larger) are deficient on the landscape, while stands dominated by small trees are more common. Stands of large trees with an open "park-like" nature are relatively scarce compared to what existed historically. Stand densities have increased and created more multi-storied stands than occurred historically. Forest vegetation has been described using 103 seral/structural stages. Thirty seral/structural stages are below HRV and 39 are above HRV across the landscape. Of the 35,920 acres of forestland within the Bandit II Planning Area, only 3,780 acres, or 11% fall within seral/structural stages that are within the historic range of variability. The 39 stages above HRV collectively contain approximately 19,150 acres that are in excess of historic acreages. The 30 stages below HRV would collectively need to be increased by about 18,150 acres to return to historic abundance.

The current trends in the area indicate that, without active management, many of these departures from the desired conditions will continue to increase.

All of the action alternatives include commercial timber harvest and/or precommercial thinning that would remove Douglas-fir, grand fir and western juniper. Stand densities would be reduced, and stands would move towards single strata conditions. Smaller trees would be removed, maintaining existing large trees and encouraging the development of

additional large trees. The amount of forested area that is dominated by fire-tolerant ponderosa pine and western larch would be increased. All of action alternatives would move the mixture of seral/structural stages towards historic conditions. Alternative 2 would manage the largest number of acres and would result in the greatest shift towards HRV. Alternative 4 would manage the second highest number of acres, followed by Alternative 3. Alternative 1, the no action alternative, would result in the landscape shifting further from the historic conditions.

Alternative 2 best meets the need to move upland vegetation toward the historic condition at the fastest rate of all the action alternatives (EA, pp. 51 and 138). Alternative 4 would move upland vegetation toward the historic condition at the second fastest rate of all the action alternatives (EA, pp. 51 and 140). Alternative 3 would move toward the historic condition at the least fastest rate. Stands would not be moved toward the historic condition under Alternative 1.

## **2. Late and Old Structure Stands**

LOS stands are an important vegetative condition specifically identified in the Eastside Screens (Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment No. 2, June 1995). The amendment defines LOS as those vegetative structures in which large trees are a common feature. It goes on to identify two different structural conditions, multi-strata and single-strata. The Eastside Screens identify that HRV should be developed for large landscapes where forest types, environmental settings, and disturbance regimes are relatively uniform. The HRV developed for the Bandit II project area (39, 200 acres) encompasses National Forest System lands within the Veazie Creek subwatershed (387 acres) and all lands within the Marks Creek Watershed.

Based on the analysis of LOS in the Bandit II project area, the amount of



multi-strata LOS is within or above the HRV for all Plant Association Groups (PAGs), while single-strata LOS is below the HRV. Table 3-22 in the EA (p. 79) displays the total amount of LOS in the project area. The HRV for multi-strata LOS is 2,299 - 6,846 acres and there are currently 8,031 acres of multi-strata LOS within the project area. The HRV for single-strata LOS is 15,159 - 27,055 acres and there are currently 2,572 acres within the project area.

Two of the three action alternatives include commercial timber harvest in multi-strata LOS stands. Alternative 2 includes commercial timber harvest on 707 acres, while Alternative 4 includes commercial timber harvest on 658 acres. Additional acres of precommercial thinning in LOS would occur in each alternative. These activities were designed to move multi-strata LOS to single-strata LOS and would result in an immediate increase in the amount of single-strata LOS and a corresponding reduction in the amount of multi-strata LOS. Neither Alternative 2 nor 4 changes all the multi-strata LOS to "open pine single strata". Multi-strata LOS would be maintained within or above its historic abundance. The overall amount of LOS would not be reduced. Reductions in stand density would reduce competitive stress. These activities would result in more large trees being maintained over time, as well as encourage the development of additional large trees.

Alternative 3 includes precommercial thinning activities within LOS that would reduce stand density and would result in more large trees being maintained over time. This would move multi-strata LOS to single-strata LOS and would result in an immediate increase in the amount of single-strata. Reductions in stand density would reduce competitive stress. These activities would result in more large trees being maintained over time, as well as encourage the development of additional large trees.

Alternative 2 best meets the need for maintaining and enhancing LOS characteristics and moving closer to



levels of historic abundance. Alternative 2 treats the largest number of acres, including the most acres within LOS stands. Alternative 2 would move 1,259 acres of multi-strata LOS to single-strata (EA, p. 81). Projections over time (EA, pp. 85-86) indicate that Alternative 2 results in the most single-strata LOS, while multi-strata LOS would continue to be within or above historic levels of abundance. Alternative 4 moves the second highest amount (1,217 acres) of multi-strata LOS to single-strata. Over time, Alternative 4 would result in the second highest amount of single-strata LOS, while maintaining multi-strata LOS within or above HRV. Alternative 3 would move 701 acres of multi-strata LOS to single strata and maintain the third highest amounts of single-strata LOS over time.

Alternative 1 does not include any treatment activities that would move multi-strata LOS to single-strata LOS. Alternative 1 would not reduce stand densities or competitive stress within LOS stands. Alternative 1 would result in fewer acres of single-strata LOS and more acres of multi-strata LOS over time (EA, pp. 85-86). Alternative 1 also results in the least overall amount of LOS being maintained over time due to excessive stand densities and resulting competitive stress which limits the development of large stand structure and predisposes stands to insects and disease.

### 3. Fire Ecology

The most common natural disturbance that has had an effect on vegetation in the project area is lightning-caused fire. Fire has been a disturbance factor in the Ochoco Mountains for thousands of years. Fire suppression over the last 90 years has eliminated most of the naturally occurring, low-intensity fires. As a result, the amount of ground fuel and the density of forest stands have increased. This has changed fire regimes and increased the amount of area that would now support a mixed severity or stand replacement fire because fuel loadings are higher,

stands are more heavily stocked with smaller trees, and fuel arrangements are more continuous

The concept of fire severity regimes combines the elements of fire frequency and fire intensity. As fires occur more frequently, fire intensity is reduced because there is less fuel to support the fire. In contrast, low fire frequency allows fuel to accumulate; when a fire does occur, there is an increased likelihood that the intensity would be high. This was demonstrated during the Hash Rock Fire. In areas where treatments had occurred and fire had been reintroduced, like the area behind Mt. Bachelor Academy, the fire intensity was reduced and firefighters were able to control the wildfire without any structures being lost.

Wildfires throughout the west last summer highlighted the issues of homes being built in the wildland/urban interface. The private land in the Marks Creek watershed has become more developed in the last ten years and will continue to be developed in the future. There is broad agreement from all groups that fuels treatments should be a priority adjacent to these areas to protect them from wildfire.

All three action alternatives propose activities that would reduce stand density (commercial timber harvest and/or precommercial thinning). They also propose prescribed fire activities that would reduce fuel loading and interrupt the continuous arrangement of fuels. The changes to the fire severity regimes are listed in Tables 3-11 and 3-12 in the EA (p. 67).

Alternative 2 includes activities on the largest number of acres and would result in the largest increase in the non-lethal (low severity) fire regime for the entire area, followed by Alternatives 4 and 3. Alternatives 2 and 4 treat the wildland/urban interface equally, followed by Alternative 3. Alternatives 2 and 4 would result in slight increases (about 30 acres) in the mixed severity fire regime; Alternative 3 would increase this by about 270 acres.

Alternative 1 does not result in any changes to the existing fire severity

regimes.

Alternative 2 best meets the need to reduce stand density, reduce fuel loading, and interrupt the continuous arrangement of fuel, followed by Alternatives 4, and 3.

#### **4. Insect and Disease Susceptibility**

Fire suppression and past harvest have resulted in increases in stand densities and predominance of late seral species such as grand fir. More multi-strata stand structures have developed as understory trees become denser. Trees are more crowded and under competitive stress for water, nutrients, growing space, and sunlight. Stands carrying higher densities are less vigorous and under increased risk of infestation to occur. Late seral species such as grand fir are more susceptible to a wider variety of insects and diseases than species such as ponderosa pine and western larch. Currently, over 15,000 acres of the forested lands within the project area are rated as high risk for mortality from insects and disease. The HRV of high-risk stands is 3,946 to 12,476 acres. It is estimated that approximately 16% of the Project Area has soils which are detrimentally damaged, primarily from compaction associated with previous harvest activities. Trees growing on compacted soils are less vigorous and grow slower than trees on noncompacted soils.

I believe that most forest visitors prefer a forest setting that is generally healthy and green, as opposed to one that is not. This does not mean that there are no dead trees, but that they are scattered throughout the landscape and are not the predominate feature. All three action alternatives would reduce stand densities, favor resistant species, modify stand structures, and reduce the amount of area at high risk to attack. The amount of high-risk acres over time is displayed in Table 3-39 in the EA (p. 99). Alternative 2 would treat the most acres currently rated as high

risk and would result in the least amount of high risk stand conditions over time, followed by Alternatives 4 and 3.

Alternative 1 does not result in a reduction in high-risk conditions and, over time, results in the most acres high risk. Based on projections, the amount of area at high risk of insect and disease outbreaks would increase to nearly 60 percent of the project area in the next 30 years.

Tables 3-47, 3-48, and 3-49 (EA, p. 121) summarize the existing soil conditions within the units proposed by each action alternative. All three alternatives propose activities in units that currently exceed the Regional standard of no more than 20% detrimental soil conditions.

Approximately 57% and 46% of the acres proposed for harvest in Alternatives 2 and 4 respectively currently exceed the standard. Soil tillage would be conducted in conjunction with timber harvest in both of these alternatives, so that the net amount of soil compaction will be reduced and Regional soil standards will be met. Alternative 2 would lower the damage class in 13 of the proposed harvest units while Alternative 4 would lower the damage class in 11 of the harvest units. Appendix C of the EA contains unit-specific practices that would be applied in Alternatives 2 and 4 to assure compliance with soil objectives. Alternatives 1 and 3 would not lower the damage class on any of the area.

### **Riparian Management Objectives**

The purpose and need includes vegetative objectives associated with riparian areas designed to meet Riparian Management Objectives (RMOs). These include increasing or maintaining shade, accelerating the development of large woody debris (LWD), and rehabilitating cottonwood and aspen stands. These objectives are addressed in Chapter 3 of the EA under Fish Habitat and Riparian Areas and

## Water Quality.

All three action alternatives include activities (commercial harvest and/or precommercial thinning) designed to enhance the conditions within existing stands of cottonwood and aspen. Activities would remove competition from encroaching conifers by cutting down or girdling trees. Fences and individual tree cages would be installed to reduce browsing damage from cattle and big game. Alternatives 2 and 4 include a two-acre aspen stand that would be commercially harvested by pulling cable from an existing road. Alternative 3 would treat this same stand by precommercial thinning. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 all treat about the same number of acres and meet the objective of maintaining hardwood communities nearly equally. Alternative 1 would not result in any enhancement or existing hardwoods, or protection from cattle and big game.

Alternatives 2 and 4 include commercial timber harvest and precommercial thinning within RHCAs to maintain existing large trees and promote the development of additional large-size trees. This would enhance long-term recruitment of LWD while maintaining existing shade conditions. This would result in an increase in pools and a decrease in temperature over time. Ground-based equipment would not operate within RHCAs, except on existing roads. Short-term increases in sediment would occur from road management activities, but sediment would be reduced over the long term by removing and closing roads within 400 feet of stream channels. Overall, Alternatives 2 and 4 would improve the quantity and quality of aquatic habitat and contribute to meeting RMOs. Reducing long-term sediment delivery would also contribute to meeting RMOs.

Alternative 3 includes precommercial thinning activities within RHCAs to increase potential for large wood recruitment, which would result in an increase in pools, an increase in shade, and a decrease in temperatures over time. Overall, Alternative 3 would improve the quantity and quality of

aquatic habitat and contribute to meeting RMOs. No short-term increases in sediment would occur from road management activities. The existing amount of roads within 400 feet of streams, and the sediment they produce, would not be reduced.

Alternative 1 would not contribute to increasing or maintaining shade or accelerating the development of large woody debris. Alternative 1 would not move towards attainment of RMOs because of the impacts of sediment from existing roads.

### **Economic Benefits**

Providing economic benefits to the local and regional communities is a specific purpose identified within the Forest Plan. These benefits are in the form of timber products and the jobs they create as well as employment from other activities. The EA (p. 118) includes an analysis of the jobs which would be created or maintained by each alternative. The anticipated timber harvest volume produced by each alternative is provided on page 51.

Alternative 2 harvests the most timber volume and includes the most activities which would generate employment opportunities. This alternative is estimated to provide 3.9 million board feet of timber volume and create or maintain 124 jobs. Alternative 4 provides the second highest amount of both volume (3.2 million board feet) and jobs (114 jobs). Alternative 3 does not propose any timber harvest, but would provide 25 jobs related to precommercial thinning and slash handpiling. Alternative 1 would not provide either timber products or jobs.

### **Post-fire Salvage Logging**

Commercial harvest within the perimeter of the 2000 Hash Rock Fire was identified as a key issue and used to formulate alternatives to the proposed action. The fire burned about 4,600 acres within the project area,

mostly within the Mill Creek Wilderness. Several comments were received concerning harvest within the fire area, both in support of and opposing post-fire salvage logging.

Alternative 2 proposes activities within the Hash Rock Fire including 98 acres of salvage harvest from an area that burned at high intensity, and another 212 acres of improvement harvest from areas that burned at moderate to low intensity. It also proposes precommercially thinning an additional 65 acres outside of harvest units and 2 acres of aspen enhancement. The EA (p. 35) provides a detailed list of the activities within the fire perimeter.

The interdisciplinary team developed the harvest proposals within the fire perimeter after carefully considering information and recommendations provided by several sources including the 1995 Beschta Report and the 1995 Everett Report as described in Chapter 1 of the EA (pp. 22-26). Salvage harvest would remove about 0.4 snags per acre over 21 inches dbh from the severely burned area while retaining 2.6 snags per acres over 21 inches dbh and all snags less than 21 inches dbh. Special considerations such as avoiding road building, using a helicopter logging system, and not harvesting within RHCA's were incorporated into this alternative.

Alternatives 3 and 4 do not propose commercial harvest within the perimeter of the Hash Rock Fire. Precommercial thinning is proposed in both alternatives in areas that burned at low to moderate severity and continue to have overstocked understories. Alternative 3 includes 108 acres of precommercial thinning while Alternative 4 includes 65 acres. Both alternatives propose 2 acres of aspen enhancement within the fire perimeter.

### **Bandit Springs Recreation Area**

Activity within the Bandit Springs Area was identified as a key issue based on public comments. This area is a designated management area in the



Forest Plan and includes about 1,500 acres in the project area. About 975 acres of the Area were burned in the Hash Rock Fire. The emphasis for this area is to provide dispersed non-motorized recreational opportunities within a setting where most management activities (timber harvest) are generally not evident to the casual observer. The Forest Plan also allows that periodic manipulation of vegetation to meet recreational and visual objectives for the area will be apparent to users of the area. Timber stands will be managed to develop and maintain resistance to catastrophic events that would detract from the recreational experience (Forest Plan, pp. 4-76 and 4-77). Many of the forest stands in the area feature large diameter ponderosa pine with developing understories. The Forest Plan notes that ponderosa pine areas should be managed for a combination of multi-storied stands and open, park-like stands. Mixed conifer areas should be managed to maintain a mix of species with an emphasis on maintaining western larch. All three action alternatives include design elements (EA, p. 43) to lessen impacts on users of the area.

Alternative 2 proposes the most activity within the Bandit Springs Area. It would include 98 acres of salvage harvest, 284 acres of improvement harvest, 2 acres of aspen enhancement, 199 acres of precommercial thinning outside of harvest units, and an additional 30 acres of natural fuels underburning. Pages 35 and 36 in the EA provide a unit-specific breakdown of activities. Alternative 2 would do the most to increase tree vigor, reduce fuels, and maintain resistance to catastrophic events such as stand replacement wildfire. Alternative 2 would maintain the most open stands in which large diameter pines are featured. Alternative 2 would be the most apparent to users of the area, since it treats the most acres and includes the most commercial harvest. Design elements (EA, p. 43) have been incorporated which would reduce impacts to recreational users.

Alternative 3 proposes 211 acres of

precommercial thinning, 2 acres of aspen enhancement, and an additional 30 acres of natural fuels underburning as detailed on page 37 of the EA. This alternative would increase stand vigor and resiliency and reduce the likelihood of catastrophic events such as the Hash Rock Fire from occurring, although not to the same extent as Alternatives 2 and 4. Multi-storied stands containing a large component of mid-sized fir trees would not be treated and not as many open stands of large diameter pine would be maintained as in Alternatives 2 and 4. Of the action alternatives, this alternative would be the least apparent to users of the area but does the least to improve vegetation resiliency to wildfire, insects, and disease.

Alternative 4 proposes 48 acres of improvement harvest, 2 acres of aspen enhancement, 218 acres of precommercial thinning outside of harvest units, and an additional 30 acres of natural fuels underburning as described on page 39 of the EA. No harvest would occur within the portion of the Area that burned in the Hash Rock Fire. Alternative 4 would increase stand vigor and resiliency less than Alternative 2, but more than Alternative 3. This alternative would harvest understory trees from one multi-storied stand containing a large number of mid-sized trees that is not included in Alternative 3. Alternative 4 would have an impact to users that is less than Alternative 2 and more than Alternative 3.

Alternative 1 would not include any activities within the Bandit Springs Area. Users of the area would not be affected by harvest or non-harvest activities. On the other hand, understories would continue to increase, stand vigor would continue to decline, and the likelihood of a catastrophic event would not be decreased. Over time, the scenic quality of the area would be impacted as open stands featuring large diameter pine are replaced by multi-storied stands with dense understories.

## **Conclusion**

The environmental analysis for this project began almost four years ago in April of 1999. During this time there have been numerous public meetings and tours of the area with a wide variety of interest groups. We have analyzed the effects of activities in two Environmental Analyses, the first being Bandit, of which I withdrew the Decision in February 2002, and now Bandit II. Throughout this lengthy and comprehensive analysis I have tried to find the common ground that everyone could support, while meeting at least some of the resource objectives which would result in a healthy resilient forest over time. Though some groups do not agree, I believe Alternative 4 does the best job. No, it does not do as good a job as Alternative 2 in this analysis or some of the earlier Bandit EA alternatives of meeting all the objectives described in the Purpose and Need. It does recognize the concerns of some about commercial treatments within the recently burned Hash Rock Fire and the Bandit Springs Recreation Area. It also addresses concerns expressed about designing an economically viable timber sale, providing jobs to Prineville and Crook County (which has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state), and others concerned about the safety of their homes from wildfire. Alternative 4 complies with state water quality standards, the standards and guidelines contained in the Forest Plan as amended, other pertinent laws such as the Endangered Species Act, and all Forest Service Policy including the Roadless Policy. Alternative 4 includes equipment cleaning requirements and other design features to minimize the introduction and spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds (EA, pp. 41-42).

Alternative 4 would increase the amount of forested area dominated by fire-tolerant species, maintain and enhance stands dominated by LOS characteristics, move forested vegetation closer towards historic conditions, and would decrease the

number of acres with potential for high-severity stand replacement fire. The amount of new and temporary road construction is kept to a minimum, thus reducing the associated resource effects. Alternative 4 includes active management aimed at achieving riparian management objectives. Alternative 4 would not cut any snags except those that are a hazard to forest workers, or the general public traveling on open roads.

I believe that the socio-economic needs of local counties, including forest products and forestry-related employment, are important. I recognize that providing economically viable timber sales is important to local communities, by providing job opportunities and personal income. Providing timber sales is also important because it assists in achieving resource objectives. Economics was a consideration in trying to maintain viable sales, but it was balanced by the need to achieve desired conditions. Offering timber for sale is also important because it provides job opportunities in communities where sawmills continue to operate such as John Day and Gilchrist, along with possible local employment associated with logging operations. Although no primary sawmills are currently operating in Crook County, the lumber and wood products sector, such as secondary manufacturing firms that rely on wood products coming off of the National Forest, is still important to the local community. Crook County unemployment rate increased to 7.8 percent in October of 2002 and the county continues to have fewer jobs than a year ago for the seventh straight month. Lumber and wood products were down 60 jobs.

As stated earlier, Alternative 2 in most cases does the best job of meeting the purpose and need for action, it was not selected because of the controversy over treatments in the Bandit Springs Recreation Area. It also includes controversial harvest within the Hash Rock Fire. The alternative treatments developed in Alternative 4, while not as

aggressive as those in Alternative 2, will still meet many of the vegetative objectives in these areas. The 98 acres of salvage proposed in Alternative 2 will not be accomplished in Alternative 4, but I believe this will not prevent the attainment of landscape objectives, or represent a serious threat to future wildfires in the area.

Alternative 3 has some benefits over the other action alternatives including less visual impact to users of the Bandit Springs Area, less risk for introduction or spread of noxious weeds, and no short-term increase in sediment from road management activities. However, I have not selected it because it does the least to move forested vegetation toward the historic range of variability and the desired conditions. Alternative 3 also does the least to maintain and enhance LOS characteristics. I also have some concerns on how practical it will be to implement this alternative. As stated in the EA (p. 139), precommercial thinning up to 12 inches dbh under this alternative would result in high fuel loadings. High fuel loadings would increase the risk of catastrophic fire until the fuels are cured and underburned. In some stands, fuel loadings would be so high that underburning would not be feasible because of the potential damage to the residual trees and more acres of expensive handpiling would be required. This alternative would also limit how effectively stands could be moved from multi-strata conditions to single-strata because mid-canopy trees would not be removed. Some diseases, such as dwarf mistletoe, could not be effectively treated in some stands.

Alternative 1 was not selected because it fails to meet the stated purpose and need for this project and would result in forested vegetation shifting further from the historic range of variability and desired conditions. Many of the future vegetative stages would tend towards mid or late-seral species composition and multi-strata characteristics. Many of these conditions are already within or above the historic condition. Existing trees

would continue to be weakened by competition and would be more susceptible to insect and disease outbreaks and stand-replacement wildfire.

#### IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The scoping process for this analysis was initiated in February 2002. Letters were sent to individuals, organizations, and other governmental agencies informing them of the proposed action and asking for their input. This letter included a description of the proposed action and the purpose and need for the project. This letter also identified that the Forest Service previously considered this proposal in the original Bandit EA as Alternative 5. All of the comments previously submitted during the preparation of the original Bandit EA (May 2001) and Decision Notice (January 2002) have been considered during this new analysis and have been included in the project record. Seven letters, one e-mail, and four telephone calls were received in response to the February 2002 scoping effort. Additional comments (five comment letters and three e-mails) were received in response were also received in response to the May 2002 version of this EA. All comments are included in the project record. The EA (pp. 10-29) summarizes scoping and public involvement efforts.

A legal notice requesting comments on this EA was published in *The Bulletin* newspaper, Bend, Oregon, on December 24, 2002. Copies of the EA were mailed to those individuals and organizations that provided comments or otherwise expressed an interest in the project. More than 80 copies of the EA were mailed. In addition to mailing, a copy of the EA was posted on the Forest website. Eight comment letters were received in response.

An appendix describing the comments and my responses is attached to this decision document ([see Appendix E](#)). Proposed activities included in

Alternative 4, the preferred alternative, were reviewed in light of both public comments and the purpose and need. Many comments focused on activities in the Bandit Springs Recreation Area, post-fire salvage, road building, commercial timber harvest, and snag habitat.

## **V. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

I have determined that implementation of the activities described in this Decision Notice will not significantly affect, either individually or cumulatively, the quality of the human environment. I have selected Alternative 4 from the Bandit II EA. An environmental impact statement is not needed because the selected alternative will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

I have considered the following factors in making this determination.

1. The activities described in Alternative 4 would be limited in scope (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). The location and extent of the selected activities is described (EA, pp. 1 and 38-39) and displayed on the alternative maps (EA, Maps M10 and M11). The effects were considered in a local context because no effects were identified that would be important on a regional or national scale.
2. The activities described in Alternative 4 do not include any significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)). Chapter 3 of the EA includes a description of the expected environmental consequences of implementing Alternative 4.
3. The activities described in Alternative 4 would not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)).
4. The activities described in Alternative 4 would not significantly affect any unique characteristics of



the geographic area such as historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. My determination is based on discussion of effects found in the EA, Chapter 3. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas located within or adjacent to the project area. A variety of historic or cultural resources are present within the project area. Known cultural or historic resources and the qualities which make them eligible to the National Register of Historic Places would be protected or avoided by all proposed activities (EA, p. 41). The effects to historic or cultural resources are described in the EA on pages 75-77.

5. The activities described in Alternative 4 do not involve effects on the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)). Public comment regarding this project is focused primarily on the Bandit Springs Recreation Area, maintaining sufficient snag levels, commercial timber harvest, salvage harvest, road construction, maintaining water quality, effects to fish and wildlife species, and providing economic benefits to the community (socio-economics). Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the effects on the Bandit Springs Recreation Area (pp. 103-107), snags (p. 89), roads (pp. 114-117), water quality (pp. 146-158), fish and riparian areas (pp. 68-74, 87, and 123-126), wildlife (pp. 56-59, 87-96, 131-132, and 158-168), and socio-economics (p. 118). Commercial timber harvest and salvage harvest are discussed throughout the EA. My selected alternative, Alternative 4, does not include any harvest or road construction within the burned area and has a reduced amount of harvest within the Bandit Springs Area. Some commenters have expressed an opposition to road

- building and commercial timber harvest activities. These comments provide information on well-established concepts such as wildlife habitat fragmentation from road building, but do not provide any new information that would necessitate a re-analysis of the conclusions contained in the EA
6. The activities described in Alternative 4 would not involve effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)). Pertinent scientific literature has been reviewed and incorporated into the analysis process. There are no conflicting scientific conclusions that require me to make a choice between them. Scientific literature does not provide a clear answer as to whether post-fire salvage logging is harmful, neutral, or benign, and depends on the type of activity (such as tractor v. helicopter logging) and the resource (such as soils or snag habitat) that was studied. The scientific literature does provide evidence that caution should be used when designing post-fire salvage logging projects. In this project, caution was used in designing the proposed salvage logging activities included in Alternative 2. I have, however, selected Alternative 4, which avoids salvage within the fire area, yet still, accomplishes many vegetative objectives.
  7. My decision to implement the activities included in Alternative 4 does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)). I have made this decision based on the overall consistency of the proposed activities with Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
  8. The effects of the implementation of activities included in Alternative 4 would not be significant, individually or cumulatively, when considered with the effects of other past and reasonably foreseeable future

- actions (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)). Cumulative effects are described throughout Chapter 3 of the EA.
9. I have determined that the activities described in Alternative 4 will not adversely affect or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)). The effects of the activities on cultural or historic resources are described in the EA on pages 75-76. Design criteria that avoid and/or protect these sites and the qualities which make them eligible to the National Register of Historic Places will be applied. There will be no effect to known historic properties. There is one Research Natural Area (Ochoco Divide) in the project area. Alternative 4 does not include any activities within the RNA. No other scientific resources are located within the project area. There will be no effect to scientific resources.
  10. The activities described in Alternative 4 are not likely to adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)). Biological Evaluations for threatened, endangered, and sensitive plants, wildlife, and fish were conducted and concluded that implementation of Alternative 4 would have no effect or would not likely adversely affect listed species (EA, pp. 123-132 and Appendix A). Programmatic consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been completed. The Biological Evaluations have been summarized in the EA and are located in the project file.
  11. The activities described in Alternative 4 will not threaten any violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)). The activities are consistent with Forest Plan direction, as amended, which has been found to be consistent with existing environmental statutes

and regulations.

## VI. OTHER FINDINGS

Federal regulations (36 CFR 219.10(e)) require that permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other activities carried out on the Lookout Mountain Ranger District are consistent with the Ochoco National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended. Accordingly, I have reviewed my decision against Forest Plan direction, and I have determined that Alternative 4 complies with all applicable Forest Plan direction, including both Management Area and Forest-Wide standards and guidelines.

In accordance with FSM 2671.44 and 2672.42, and regulations set forth in Section 7(a) of the Endangered Species Act, Biological Evaluations were prepared to evaluate the effects of the planned activities on Federally listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, and Region 6 Forest Service sensitive species. Appendix A of the EA provides a summary of effects for these species. Activities in Alternative 4 has been determined *not likely to adversely affect* the Northern bald eagle and Canada lynx; have *no effect* on other federally listed or proposed species; will have *no impact* for many sensitive species; and for other sensitive species *may impact individuals or habitat but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or a loss of viability*. Programmatic consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been completed.

Prescribed fire activities would be in accordance with provisions of the Clean Air Act as administered by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (EA, p. 56).

The proposed activities would not impact the functional values of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and will not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990. There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers or ecologically

critical areas in the project area (EA, p. 169).

I have determined that, in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice) the proposed activities do not have a disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations or low-income populations (EA, p. 169).

The Forest Plan, as amended, guides natural resource management activities and establishes management standards and guidelines for the Ochoco National Forest. The Forest Plan requires compliance with State requirements in accordance with the Clean Water Act through the application of BMPs. The Environmental Protection Agency has certified the Oregon Forest Practices Act and regulations as BMPs. The State of Oregon has compared Forest Service practices with the State practices and concluded that Forest Service practices meet or exceed State requirements (Bandit II Water Quality Report, Appendix C).

## VII. IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of this project will not occur for a minimum of 50 days following publication of the legal notice in *The Bulletin* newspaper, Bend, Oregon. If an appeal is filed, implementation will not occur for a minimum of 15 days following disposition of the appeal. If multiple appeals are filed, the disposition date of the last appeal will control the implementation date.

## VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

My decision to implement Alternative 4 of the Bandit II EA is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any written notice of appeal must be consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, content of an appeal, including the reasons for the appeal. Additionally, people holding written authorization to forest uses

have the right to appeal under 36 CFR part 251. Any appeal must be filed with the Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, ATTN: 1570 Appeals, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon 97208-3623. Appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date that the legal notice appears in *The Bulletin* newspaper.

For further information, contact myself or Rob Rawlings (Project Leader) at 3160 NE Third Street, P.O. Box 490, Prineville, Oregon 97754, or via telephone at 541-416-6500.

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ARTHUR J. CURRIER  
DATE  
District Ranger

**NOTE:** The Decision Notice was signed on 3/4/03, the Legal Notice was published in *The Bulletin* on 3/11/03, and the Appeal Period will end on 4/25/03.

Posted to web on 3/13/03

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