

## Decision Memo

### SUGAR CREEK CAMPGROUND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

USDA - Forest Service  
Ochoco National Forest  
Paulina Ranger District  
Crook County, Oregon

This Decision Memo documents a decision by the District Ranger to proceed with the Sugar Creek Vegetation Management Project on the Paulina Ranger District. The Project Record supporting this Decision Memo is available for public review at the Paulina Ranger District Office, 7803 Beaver Creek Road, Paulina, Oregon.

#### DECISION

As District Ranger for the Paulina Ranger District, I have made the decision to implement the Sugar Creek Vegetation Management Project. This project will commercially harvest 34 acres of ponderosa pine, and non-commercially thin 55 acres of overly dense, second growth ponderosa pine stands that are imminently susceptible to attack by bark beetles and that encompass the Sugar Creek Campground. These stands consist almost entirely of second-growth ponderosa pine; no recent harvest has occurred in this area. Natural fuels under burning on 21 acres, slash treatment, and planting of trees and shrubs will also be included in this project. The largest, healthiest, most vigorous trees will be maintained in meeting density guidelines. Excess trees of commercial size (7 inches to 20.9 inches dbh) will be cut by hand with chainsaws or cut with a machine-mounted feller/buncher. When possible, cut trees will be skidded on existing skid trails using rubber tired or track mounted tractors to existing landing areas where they will be processed into commercial products. Products will be removed from the site using self loading or conventional log trucks.

Specific stand density reduction measures and slash treatment actions include the following:

#### Unit 1 – 34 gross acres

Activities include:

- Commercial harvest of trees 7.0” to 20.9” in diameter, thinning from below. Trees will be felled, limbed and bucked on site.
- There will be a 50-foot no harvest buffer each side of the stream along Sugar Creek.
- There will be a 50-foot equipment restriction along both sides of Dutchman Creek. Trees within 10 feet of the creek bank will be left for bank stability.
- Commercial material will be line-winchd from a skidder, or taken by boomed equipment from within the 50-foot zone along Dutchman Creek.
- Logging slash will be handpiled immediately after harvest operations end.
- Piles will be burned the following spring.
- Noncommercial thinning will occur in the unit to within 50 feet each side of Sugar Creek and to within 10 feet of Dutchman Creek. Slash will be handpiled and burned.
- Hardwood planting and caging will occur along the streams.

#### Unit 2 – 14 acres

Activities include:

- Pre-treatment of existing fuels by underburning in the spring.
- Noncommercial thinning of trees less than 11” in diameter
- Noncommercial thinning slash will be lopped and scattered and under burned when cured.

- Snag creation where feasible in the southernmost part of the unit outside the campground area.

### Unit 3 – 7 acres

#### Activities include:

- Noncommercial thinning of trees less than 11” in diameter.
- Noncommercial thinning slash will be lopped and scattered and underburned when cured.

In addition to actions listed above, my decision includes implementing the design criteria/mitigation measures established for this project and described in the recreation, scenic resources, hydrology, soils, and silviculture reports, and in the biological evaluations for botany, fish, and wildlife, all in the project file.

The project is located in the Upper Beaver Creek Watershed, within Crook County, Oregon. The legal description is Township 15 South, Range 24 East, Section 35, (see attached map).

### **RATIONALE**

Tree density levels of the three units are currently above the thresholds which stands are considered imminently susceptible to attack by bark beetles. The trees exhibit poor growth rates and low vigor, indicators that they will have difficulty fending off attacks by bark beetles. Bark beetles are present within the stands and are actively killing small groups of pines. Without treatment, it is predicted the stands will face increasing levels of bark beetle attack, resulting in many of the largest trees being killed.

Thinning will lower the probability of serious tree mortality from bark beetles by:

(1) changing aspects of the physical environment such as light, temperature, and air movement, thus reducing the effectiveness of pheromone communication between host seeking beetles and beetles already at trees suitable for attack; (2) increasing the amounts of water, nutrients, and light available for remaining trees, allowing trees to increase in vigor and produce protective oleoresins, which, upon attack, exude from the beetle holes and pitch out the attacking beetles; (3) reducing the host resource base that supports beetle populations; and (4) raising stand temperatures to levels that can reduce beetle survival. This project will help provide healthy stands which may be managed in the future in a manner which is consistent with objectives outlined in the Ochoco National Forest Land Management Plan.

### **SCOPING**

The Sugar Creek Vegetation Management Project was first included in the Central Oregon Schedule of Projects Winter 2003; the latest notice was posted in the January-March, 2007 edition. A letter requesting public involvement was provided on December 21, 2006 to stakeholders, elected officials, federal, state, and local agency personnel, tribal representatives, and other interested individuals and organizations on the Paulina Ranger District mailing list. A list of those publics receiving the letter is included in the project file.

Nine responses were received during scoping. A copy of these responses can be found in the project file.

### **FINDINGS**

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the project is consistent with the following:

- National Forest Management Act
- National Historic Preservation Act and SHPO policies: this project would be exempt from a case-by-case review by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer and covered under the 2004 Programmatic Agreement
- Ochoco National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan
- The Endangered Species Act with a finding of May Affect/Not Likely to Adversely Affect for Northern Bald Eagle, a No Impact finding for sensitive plant, wildlife and fish species except for a finding of May Impact Individuals or Habitat, But Will Not Likely Contribute To A Trend Towards Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to The Population Or Species for silverskin lichen and Columbia spotted frog.

#### Finding of the Absence of Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

Based on my review of the interdisciplinary analysis, I find that the project does not adversely affect threatened, endangered, or sensitive species or critical habitat or floodplains and wetlands nor does the project area contain (1) municipal watersheds, (2) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas, (3) inventoried roadless areas, or (4) Research Natural Areas. I, therefore, find that the Sugar Creek Vegetation Management Project poses no adverse impacts to the extraordinary circumstances identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30.3, Part 2.

#### Finding of Exclusion from Further National Environmental Policy Act Analysis

Based on my review of the project file for the proposed activity, I find that the project is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). I also find that the project will produce negligible adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively, on the physical, biological, or social components of the human environment. Therefore, the Sugar Creek Vegetation Management Project is categorically excluded from analysis in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (40 CFR 1508.4 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3, Part 1) and that the category of exclusion is Category 12 as identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 31.2.

### **APPEALS AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

My decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Any appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Forest Supervisor, Ochoco National Forest, 3160 NE Third Street, Prineville, OR 97754. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 7:30 am – 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Appeals submitted via fax should be sent to (541) 416-6695.

Appeals can be filed electronically at: [appeals-pacificnorthwest-ochoco@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-pacificnorthwest-ochoco@fs.fed.us). Electronic appeals must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in plain text (.txt), Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf). E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed, or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of the legal notice announcing this decision in *The Bulletin* newspaper, Bend, Oregon. Attachments received after the 45-day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in *The Bulletin* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

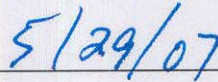
**CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

For further information regarding the Sugar Creek Vegetation Management Project, contact Deb Mafera, Project Coordinator, at the following address or telephone number:

Paulina Ranger District  
7803 Beaver Creek Road  
Paulina, OR 97751  
(541) 477-6914



MIKE LAWRENCE  
District Ranger



Date