

**Decision Memo
2008-2012 Pre-commercial Thinning
Cottage Grove Ranger District
Umpqua National Forest
Lane County, Oregon**

Decision

I have decided to approve pre-commercial thinning projects on the Cottage Grove Ranger District.

The Proposed Action entails the systematic selective cutting of excess trees in overstocked plantations leaving healthy conifer and hardwood trees of various species. The project also includes treatment of associated hazardous fuels.

Project Location

Layng, Brice and Sharps Creek watersheds: T21S, R1E; Sec. 6-9, 12, 13, 25-28, 32-36; T21S, R2E; Sec. 9, 17 18, 20, 29, 32 & 33. T22S, R1E; Sec. 1, 2, 4, 9, 11-16, 19, 20, 23, 24, 28-31 & 36. T22S, R2E; sec. 4, 5, 7-9, 15-18, 20-22, 26-35. T23S, R1W; Sec. 25, 26 & 35. T23S, R1E; Sec. 2, 3, 6, 17-21, & 30. T23S, R2E; sec. 2-6, 9, 10, & 16.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to reduce stand densities, prolong early seral stage stand structure, increase growth rate of dominant trees, and enhance species diversity. Associated hazardous fuels reduction would reduce fuel bed depths along major roads and improve condition class. A total of 3761 acres of plantations have been identified as potentially benefiting from thinning under this proposal, and are summarized in the table below:

Pre-commercial thinning needs 07/07/2007

Land Use Allocation	Watershed			Grand Total
	Brice Creek	Layng Creek	Sharps Creek	
LSR	934			934
Matrix	1,140	1,111	575	2,826
Grand Total	2,075	1,111	575	3,761

Matrix Thinning

The majority of stands proposed for thinning (2826 acres) are in matrix areas of the Layng Creek, Brice Creek and Sharps Creek watersheds. This component of the project would accomplish thinning in plantations that range between 10 and 24 years old. Average spacing has been prescribed on a site-specific basis, and will result in stocking levels ranging between 160 and 260 trees per acre.

LSR Thinning

The remaining stands proposed for thinning (934 acres) are in the South Cascades LSR (RO222) in the Brice Creek watershed. This project will leave the healthiest conifer and hardwood trees using variable spacing techniques to enhance structural diversity in plantations that range between 13 and 24 years old. Average spacing has been prescribed on a site-specific basis, and will result in stocking levels ranging between 160 and 220 trees per acre. This component of the project is consistent with objectives of the South Cascades LSR Assessment (February, 1998), which include “to place stands on the path to produce late seral structures, to increase the size of what will eventually become late seral blocks ... and to produce large wood as quickly as possible for recruitment into streams.” It is also consistent with the REO Exemption Criteria for Reforestation, Release, and Young Stand Thinning (4/20/95).

Hazardous fuels treatment may occur within 50 feet of high-use forest roads. Fuels prescriptions will be site-specific and contingent on fuel loading, stand structure and physio-graphic considerations. Methods will include a hand-piling and burning thinning slash, pruning lower 50% of live crowns of larger leave trees, and limbing thinning slash on 3 sides.

Findings as Required by Law, Policy and Regulation

Finding of Consistency with Applicable Forest Service Management Direction and the National Forest Management Act

Based on my review of the interdisciplinary analysis for this project, I find that the project is consistent with the standards, guidelines, and amendments of the Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan and is therefore consistent with the National Forest Management Act. This finding includes all of the following determinations documented in the specialists’ reports for this project:

This project will not prevent attainment of the goals and objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.

This project is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines in the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, as amended and the 1990 Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended.

Therefore, I find that the Pre-commercial Thinning Project is consistent with all applicable Forest Service management direction.

Finding of Consistency with State Historic Preservation Office Policies

Based on my review of the heritage resource report, I find that the project is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.

Finding of Non-Jeopardy to Endangered, Threatened or Sensitive Species and No Adverse Effect to Species Covered Under the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act

The District Fisheries Biologist has determined that this project would have no effect on any endangered or threatened species or their critical habitat, no effect on Essential Fish Habitat, and no impact on any sensitive species. This project complies with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

The District Wildlife Biologist has determined that this project would have no effect on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat, and no impact on Management Indicator or Survey and Manage Species. This project may impact individuals or their habitat, but will not likely contribute towards a Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species for any species on the R6 Regional Forester's sensitive species list. Therefore, I find that the Pre-commercial Thinning Project does not jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species.

The District Botanist has determined that this project would have no effect on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat, and no impact on Survey and Manage Species. This project may impact individuals or their habitat, but will not likely contribute towards a Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species for any species on the R6 Regional Forester's sensitive species list.

Finding of the Absence of Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

Scoping to determine the presence or absence of potential effects on extraordinary circumstances occurred in the 2007 Spring and Summer editions of the Umpqua National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions; no requests for information or statements of interest were received. Based on my review of the interdisciplinary analysis, I find that this project does not adversely affect any of the extraordinary circumstances listed in 1909.15, 30.3(2). Specifically, I find that this project does not adversely affect: (a) endangered or threatened species or their critical habitats, or any Forest Service sensitive species; (b) floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds; (c) Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness or National Recreation Areas; (d) inventoried roadless areas; (e) Research Natural Areas; (f) Native American religious or cultural sites, or archaeological or historic properties and sites.

Finding of Consistency with All Applicable Federal Laws and Regulations

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project and all applicable specialists' reports, I find that the project is consistent with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Forest Management Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. Therefore, I find that the Pre-commercial Thinning Project is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations.

Finding of Exclusion from Further National Environmental Policy Act Analysis

Based on my review of (1) the actions associated with this project; (2) the environmental consequences documented in the interdisciplinary analysis; (3) the consistency of this project with applicable laws, regulations, and management direction; (4) the non-

jeopardy to endangered or threatened species or heritage resources; and (5) the absence of adverse effects to extraordinary circumstances; I find that this project is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27) and that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with these projects (FSH 1909.15). I also find that this project will produce no adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively, on the physical, biological, or social components of the human environment. Therefore, I find that the Pre-commercial Thinning 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 (6) as identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 31.2.

Appeals

Pursuant to the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of California September 20, 2005 clarification in *Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, this decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) in accordance with 36 CFR 215. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer:

Forest Supervisor, Umpqua National Forest
Attn 1570 Appeals
2900 NW Stewart Parkway, Roseburg, OR 97470.
Business hours: 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays
Phone 541-957-3203; FAX 541-957-3495.

Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to appeals-pacificnorthwest-umpqua@fs.fed.us.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Roseburg News-Review, the official newspaper of record, which 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. The notice of appeal must include (36 CFR 215.14):

1. Appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available.
2. Signature or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal).
3. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant upon request.
4. The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision.
5. Any specific change(s) in the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement.
6. Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement.

7. Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
8. How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

Implementation

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day from the close of the appeal filing period (36 CFR 215.9(a)). If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition. In the event of multiple appeals, the implementation date will be established following the last appeal deposition (36 CFR 215.9(b)).

No comments were received and no appeals were filed.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Paul Higgins, (541) 767-5043 or pfhiggins@fs.fed.us or at the Cottage Grove Ranger District, Cedar Park Rd., Cottage Grove, Oregon 97424.

/s/ Deborah Schmidt
DEBORAH G. SCHMIDT
District Ranger

January 30, 2008
Date Signed

December 13, 2007
Date Published