Preliminary Decision Memo

Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project

USDA Forest Service
Sisters Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon
T15S, R09E, Sections 18, 19, 20 and 21 W.M.

BACKGROUND

On July 24, 2006 a fire started in the Three Sisters Wilderness. The fire subsequently burned to the east and outside the wilderness. At the time of containment the fire had burned about 9,407 acres, including 4,827 acres of National Forest lands. Initially about 416 acres of potential timber salvage opportunities (areas of stand replacement fire), outside of wilderness and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA), were identified from district stand examination records and burn severity mapping. Further field reconnaissance, district office review, and recommendations by the Region Six Rapid Assessment Team (RAT) narrowed this to about 201 acres (about 194 acres of salvage and about seven acres of danger trees located along log haul routes) of economically viable ground-based salvage opportunities. Areas eliminated from further consideration included stands difficult or impossible to reforest (i.e. lava flows), areas unsuitable due to irreversible resource damage, or areas that are economically non-viable.

The proposed Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project would occur within dry mixed conifer forest, at elevations from about 4200 to 5000 feet. All proposed units are located in the white fir series, meaning that these sites would succeed to white fir in the absence of a disturbance that creates conditions for regeneration of early seral species, primarily ponderosa pine. Historically ponderosa pine was maintained in a "fire climax" status by a frequent, low severity fire regime, but due to fire exclusion and selective harvest of pines these stands were dominated by white fir less than 80 years of age. The historic fire regime in this area, based on the preponderance of ponderosa pine in the overstory and presence of fire scars, was probably very similar to the lower elevation ponderosa pine series. Plant associations within the project area vary from mixed conifer/snowbrush/sedge, mixed conifer/snowbrush-manzanita/sedge-penstemon association, and mixed conifer/snowbrush/sedge-bracken fern.

Previous management entries in this area removed varying amounts of overstory ponderosa pine, shifting the species composition towards a higher percentage of the fire-intolerant white fir. This action coupled with fire exclusion during the last 80-100 years (which lead to the growth of ladder fuels and buildup of dead surface fuels) resulted in stand replacement fire severity effects over the majority of the project area, including the proposed salvage units. Due to the dense understory and buildup of surface fuels, these units experienced severe stand replacement fire, resulting in mortality greater than 75 percent.

Existing Condition

Proposed units 1 through 6 consisted of an overstory of 6 to 15 large (21-48 in. diameter at breast height (dbh)) yellow-bark ponderosa pine per acre, with an estimated age of 250 to 350 years.

Overstory mortality ranges from 90 to 100 percent. The understory was composed mainly of white fir 6 to 20 in. dbh, ranging from 75 to 300 trees per acre. Mortality of the white fir understory is generally close to 100 percent. The ponderosa pine seed source is limited within and adjacent to these units due to mortality from the fire. A good cone crop coincided with the fire, and there is potential for natural regeneration of ponderosa pine, depending on the degree of damage to the cones during the fire.

Proposed unit 7 was dominated by 9 to 20 inch dbh white fir, and most of the original ponderosa pine overstory had been removed. The stand is essentially 100 percent dead, and there is little or no ponderosa pine seed source.

Proposed unit 8 was a stand of orange bark ponderosa pine 16 to 24 inches dbh. Mortality was generally heavy, with some green patches remaining within the unit. Seed source is limited, but is more available than in other units.

Need for Action

Stands of economically valued species such as ponderosa pine and white fir were severely burned, and approximately 75-100% of the trees were killed. As time progresses these trees lose economic value due to staining, insects, and checking (cracks in the wood that occur as the burned wood dries). By the late spring or early summer 2007 up to 60% of the economic value of these trees could be lost.

It is likely that many of the stands that experienced stand replacement fire will not have an adequate natural seed source to regenerate the forest to the desired future conditions. In these situations there may be a need to plant trees to restore the forest conditions desired in Late Successional Reserve allocations.

The Black Crater Fire burned across 13.6 miles of roads that will be used as commercial haul routes. There is a need to improve safety along these roads for all Forest users.

Purpose of the Project

The purposes of this project within the Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project Area are to:

- Harvest fire killed timber that has economic value.

- Reforest desired tree species (where natural, on-site, seed sources are lacking) within salvage units to aid in the accelerated development of forest conditions consistent with management plan objectives.

- Improve public, administrative and operational safety by removing danger trees along commercial haul routes.

Overview of the Proposed Action

It is proposed to salvage a maximum of 201 acres of fire killed timber located in Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), yielding about 2.25 million board feet of ponderosa pine, white fir,

and lodgepole pine. Eight (8) harvest units were identified as being economically viable; assuming six of the most likely to persist snags (ponderosa pine and/or white fir) would be left per acre. Harvest would remove dead trees of all species and heavily scorched white fir and lodgepole pine that have a low likelihood of survival in areas of stand replacement fire severity. All units would be logged using ground-based systems. Approximately ¼ mile of temporary road (utilizing existing non-system road) would be needed for access.

Management allocations in the project area include Late Successional Reserve and Front Country (Management Area 18 in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)). The project is located entirely within the Trout Creek Management Strategy Area, Cache-Trout Late Successional Reserve.

About 194 acres have been identified for salvage timber harvest, including seven acres of haul route, for a total of 201 acres

Table 1. Harvest Area Summary

Unit	Acres	Prescription	Fuels Treatment	Logging System	Allocation
1	32	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
2	44	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
3	8	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
4	15	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
5	10	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
6	15	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
7	48	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
8	22	HSV-SR	LTA/PB	Ground-Based	LSR
Total	**194**				

Note: Units 3 and 5 are located in stand replacement fire areas > 10 acres.
HSV-SR: Salvage in stand replacement severity. LTA: Leave tops attached to last log. PB: Burn landing piles. LSR: Late Successional Reserve.

DECISION

I have decide to harvest about 2.25 million board feet (MMBF) of fire killed timber (including heavily scorched white fir and lodgepole pine based on the degree of crown and bole scorch) from 201 acres within the Black Crater Fire area. All harvest units are located in the Trout Creek Management Strategy Area, Cache-Trout Late-Successional Reserve (LSR). The judicious and timely harvesting of fire-killed trees will maximize their economic value.

I have concluded that fire killed timber can be harvested in an environmentally sound manner without adversely impacting resources of concern in the project area. All units will be harvested using ground-based logging equipment. To the extent possible, fire-killed trees will be whole-tree yarded, and logging slash will be treated at log landings. About ¼ mile of temporary road is necessary to access unit six and will be closed after logging is completed; no new road construction will take place. No green trees, with the exception of heavily scorched white fir and lodgepole pine that have a low likelihood of survivial, will be harvested. In addition, the removal of danger trees along haul routes will improve public, administrative, and operational safety. The project will impact about 4% of the Black Crater Fire area and about 0.71% of the 28,747 acre Cache-Trout LSR (2.7% of the Trout Creek Management Strategy Area, a subset of the Cache-Trout LSR).

The proposed action was reviewed by the Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) to ensure that it was in compliance with the standards and guidelines for salvage logging in a Late-Successional Reserve. The project meets all relevant standards and guidelines. A REO Letter of Concurrence is included as part of the project file.

I have assessed the potential impacts of salvaging logging on northern spotted owl habitat. Salvaging logging will take place in areas of stand replacement fire that currently do not function as northern spotted owl habitat and will not function as habitat in the immediate future. The project will not harvest fire killed trees in areas of mixed fire severity that are currently suitable dispersal habitat, nest core areas, or nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat (NRF) for northern spotted owl. Habitat constituents such as snags and coarse woody debris will be left in harvest units to provide structural complexity for wildlife and wildlife prey species and regenerating stands.

The project **May Affect, But Not Likely to Adversely Affect** the northern spotted owl. The project complies with all relevant Project Design Criteria (PDC). Further consultation with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not required.

I requested that a snag retention strategy specifically be developed for this project using the most currently available scientific literature (i.e. DecAid). The snag retention strategy was approved by Regional wildlife biologists at the REO. The strategy consisted of two parts: addressing wildlife species that prefer open snag conditions and those that would benefit from post-fire unharvested areas. The strategy addressed existing snag levels by plant association group (PAG) at the landscape level. Dead trees in the east-side mixed conifer PAG, the dominant PAG in the project area, are considered in "excess" at the landscape level due to previous recent large scale stand replacement fire events on the Sisters Ranger District (i.e. Eyerly, Cache, Link, Lake George, and B&B fires). The magnitude of salvage logging in the east-side mixed conifer PAG would not impact or diminish the ability of this habitat type to support cavity nesters or their prey base at the project or landscape level.

Six (6) of the most likely to persist snags will be left per acre in the proposed harvest units to meet wildlife habitat needs. These densities will provide adequate habitat for wildlife focal species and their prey base that prefer open stand conditions. Snags will primarily be large diameter ponderosa pine; however, white-fir would be retained if ponderosa pine is not present. Snags are expected to last through the early life of the developing stand (30 years) and will function as down woody material as they decay and reach the forest floor. Bird species, such as Black-backed woodpecker, would continue to benefit from post-fire closed stand conditions in areas outside of the proposed harvest units. For a detailed discussion of Snags and Down Wood see the Wildlife Specialists Report on file on the Sisters Ranger District.

I will rely on natural regeneration to reforest stands harvested in this project, depending on available seed sources. Natural regeneration is the preferred method to restock stands located in LSR. I will authorize the reforestation of up to 198 acres in order to achieve the long-range objectives for the Whychus LSRA, however, if natural regeneration is deemed to be inadequate to meet the desired future condition for the east-side mixed conifer PAG. This will provide for the rapid establishment of tree species important for the management of the LSR and to meet the desired landscape condition by PAG. Artificial reforestation will allow succession to take place

at a faster rate, helping to achieve LSR objectives sooner if natural regeneration does not produce the desired outcome.

Various mitigation measures and project design criteria apply to the project. See the Mitigation section of this document for more details.

The project meets the requirements found at **FSH 1909.15 - 31.12 Categories of Actions for Which a Project or Case File and Decision Memo are Required.** Specifically, the project meets **Category 31.12 (13). Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more that ½ mile of temporary road construction.**

This category was established after extensive review of similar projects by the Forest Service which has determined these types of projects do not have significant environmental effects when there are no extraordinary circumstances (Federal Register volume 68, Number 145, pages 44598-44599).

I have determined that the project Purpose and Need, limited scale, limited environmental effects, and findings in the Federal Register provide the rationale for the use of this category.

Extraordinary Circumstances

In determining the appropriateness of using a categorical exclusion, a determination of the potential impact to the resource conditions (extraordinary circumstances) identified in FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3(2) must be made. The mere presence of one or more of the following resource conditions does not preclude the use of a categorical exclusion. It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.

The following is a list of the potential effects to the resource conditions in the project area (Specialists Reports are located in the project record located at the Sisters Ranger District, Sisters, Oregon).

1) Federally listed threatened, endangered or sensitive (TES) species or designated habitat or species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat.

Botanical Species:

There will be **No Adverse Impacts** to TES or Survey and Manage (S&M) plant populations, or their potential habitats. No known TES or S&M plant species occur within the project area and there is generally low probability of finding TES and S&M species in the dry white fir and ponderosa pine plant association associated with the project area.

Wildlife Species:

There will be a **"May Effect but is not likely to Adversely Affect"** determination for northern spotted owl and its habitat.

There will be **No Impact** to horned grebes, California wolverine, Pacific fishers, or Crater Lake Tightcoil and their associated habitats.

Regional Forester's Sensitive Species: After a review of records, habitat requirements, and existing habitat components, it was determined that the following sensitive species do not occur and have no habitat in the project area and will not be included in any further analysis: bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola,)* harlequin duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*), red-necked grebe (*Podiceps gisegena*), tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*), yellow rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*), western sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus phaeios*), American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), and pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*). The Proposed Action will have **No Impact** on these species.

The Proposed Action will have **"No Effect"** on the Oregon spotted frog or its habitat. A small portion of Trout Creek is within the project area. There is no spotted frog habitat associated with Trout Creek.

Aquatic Species:

There will be **No Effect** to Columbia River Bull Trout or Chinook Salmon in the project area (the subwatershed does not contain bull trout or salmon habitat).

There will be **No Impact** to Interior Redband Trout populations or their habitat. Timber salvage units are located in upland areas, with little to no risk of sediment reaching Trout Creek. Log haul along roads will be restricted during wet weather periods to prevent the runoff of fine sediments to Trout Creek.

2) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 provides direction to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, ". . . the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year."

- There are no floodplains within the project area.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 was promulgated to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, ". . . areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds."

- There are no wetlands within the project area.

Municipal Watersheds

- There are no municipal watersheds within the project area.

3) Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or national recreation areas.

- The project is not located within a wilderness, a wild and scenic river, or national recreation area.

4) Inventoried Roadless Areas.

- There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas in the project area. The project would not construct any permanent or temporary roads in Inventoried Roadless Areas.

5) Research Natural Areas.

- There are no existing or proposed Research Natural Areas in the project area.

6) American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through "in situ" preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items.

- This decision complies with the cited Acts.

Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision. No prehistoric sites were located in the project area. A **No Historic Properties Affected** determination was made for the project.

- No cultural resource sites will be impacted by the project.

Review of Effects Determinations

There are no adverse effects to any federally listed or endangered wildlife, fish, or botanical species or their habitats. Environmental analysis has concluded that the project will not have a significant effect on the quality of the natural and human environment. Therefore, the project is excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS).

Northern Spotted Owl

I have carefully considered project effects relative to northern spotted owl, a Federally listed Threatened wildlife species. (For a more detailed discussion see the Biological Evaluation of Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife Report in the project analysis file). The following points are germane to the project:

Discussion

In reviewing the Project Design Criteria as outlined in the 2006-2009 Programmatic Biological Assessment, the project will not remove any constituent habitat elements for the northern spotted owl. In addition, the project does not reduce nesting, roosting, or foraging (NRF) or dispersal habitat. No timber salvage harvest units are located in owl core areas. There has been no known owl use of the Trout Creek home range since 1994 and only sporadic use of the Black Crater home range. Research has shown that spotted owls do not use areas of 91-100% canopy mortality. All units are within stand replacement intensity areas that do not currently function as owl habitat.

Critical Habitat Unit (CHU) OR-5 is located in the project area. CHUs were developed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a network of habitat to support continued persistence of the northern spotted owl throughout its home range. Maintenance of habitat within CHUs is an important consideration. Salvage harvest and associated treatments will occur within the CHU; however, the CHU is not currently functioning as owl habitat due to fire severity (see above). Planting desired tree species for the development of long-term Late Successional Reserve habitat could have beneficial effects. Project design would mitigate any disturbance from salvage logging within the home range of the northern spotted owl.

The "May Effect" determination is a function of the use of the project design criteria and conducting salvage operations in a CHU.

Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Proposed Action meets all Project Design Criteria as listed in the FY2006-2009 Programmatic Biological Assessment. Further consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not required.

Silvicultural Prescription

A silvicultural prescription was developed to treat harvest units in the project area. The prescription calls for the salvage harvest of fire killed trees in areas of stand replacement fire severity. Fire killed trees of all species and low probability of survival white fir and lodgepole pine (in excess of snag and coarse woody debris needs) in stands that are 75 percent or more dead in terms of stand basal area would be removed. Ponderosa pine with any amount of detectable live foliage will be left standing. Douglas-fir is absent or rare within harvest units; however, any Douglas-fir with live foliage will be left standing if available. White fir and lodgepole pine with live foliage will be left or taken depending on the degree of crown and bole scorch from the fire.

The following criteria will be used to assess the probability of survival for white fir and lodgepole pine:

White Fir

- Trees greater than 30" diameter at breast height (DBH) with >85% crown volume scorch or trees less than 30" DBH with >50% crown volume scorch, **or**

- Trees greater than 30" DBH with 20-85% crown volume scorch AND >80% bole circumference charred (any height), or trees less than 30" DBH with 20-50% crown volume scorch AND >40% of bole circumference charred (any height), **or**

- Trees with 100% bole circumference charred (any height), **or**

- Trees near the threshold of damage under #1 or #2, and also have evidence of charring of lateral roots in two or more quadrants.

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Lodgepole Pine

- Trees with >50% crown volume scorch, **or**

- Trees with >60% bole circumference charred (any height), **or**

- Trees near threshold of damage under #1 or #2, and also have evidence of charring of lateral roots in two or more quadrants

Mitigation Measures and Project Design Criteria

The following mitigations and project design criteria will be used in the Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project (see Specialists Reports located in the project file):

Wildlife
Northern Spotted Owl

- Disruptive work activities will not take place within ¼ mile (1.0 miles for blasting, ½ mile for helicopter) of nest sites or activity centers of all known pairs or resident singles between March 1 and September 30. This condition may be waived in a particular year if nesting or reproductive success surveys reveal that spotted owls are not nesting or that no young are present that year. Waivers are valid only until March 1 of the following year. There are no units within ¼ mile of any spotted owl nest stand, but surveys during the spring of 07 will be conducted to determine any owl activity.
- Surveys according to the R6 protocol will be conducted during the spring of 2007 on all existing habitat and former home ranges.

Fish

- Log haul along roads will be restricted during wet weather periods to prevent runoff of fine sediments to Trout Creek. This mitigation will be incorporated into the Timber Sale Contract.

Invasive Plant Species

- Use timber sale contract clauses to prevent the inadvertent introduction of invasive plant species by contractors.
- Minimize soil disturbance to the extent possible, consistent with project objectives.

Visual Quality

The following is applicable for all salvage harvest units within the Foreground landscape (0-½ mile along access and travel corridors) and Middleground landscape area (1/2-4 miles, as seen or viewed from City of Sisters, Highway 20, and Black Butte) within the Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage area.

- Post treatment clean-up activities for foreground landscape within the proposed treatment units and landings along access and travel corridors (such as along Forest Roads 15, 1512, 1510, 1520, 1018, and 1024) frequented by the recreating public should be completed within 2 years as specified under Deschutes National Forest LRMP standards and guidelines. Slash clean up activities along access and travel corridors should be completed with a low impact machine or by hand piling.
- Minimize ground disturbance and damage to vegetation within foreground landscape areas as seen from recreation sites, access, and travel corridors. Whole tree yarding to a specified landing site during packed snow or frozen ground could help to reduce effects to visual quality.
- Stumps visible from recreation sites, access and travel corridors should be cut to 8" or lower within the immediate foreground landscape area. Special consideration is given, on a case by case basis, to cover for areas where erosion control strategy may require a stump height taller than 8".
- Maintain residual trees, such as wildlife snags or clumps, in a dispersed and irregular pattern within the Foreground and Middleground landscape areas. Residual trees, both dead and alive, are an important component in the landscape, particularly as seen or viewed from the City of Sisters and Highway 20, and Black Butte. Residual trees will help maintain line, form, color, and texture elements in the landscape.
- Where possible, design and locate skid trails and landing areas at least 300 feet away from access, and travel corridors. Using parallel (to a travel corridor) skid trails could help to reduce "shot gun" visual effect.

Soils

- Use existing log landing and skid trail networks (whenever possible) or designate locations for new skid trails and landings.
- Designated locations for new trails and landings need to best fit the terrain and minimize the extent of soil disturbance.
- Maintain spacing of 100 to 150 feet for all primary (main) skid trail routes, except where converging at landings. Closer spacing due to complex terrain must be approved in advance by the Timber Sale Administrator and Soil Scientist. Main skid trails have typically been spaced 100 feet apart (11% of the unit area). For the larger activity areas

(greater than 40 acres) that can accommodate wider spacing distances, it is recommended that distance between main skid trails be increased to 150 feet to reduce the amount of detrimentally disturbed soil to 7 percent of the unit area. This would reduce the amount of surface area where restoration treatments, such as subsoiling, would be required to mitigate impacts to achieve soil management objectives.

- Restricting skidders and tractors to designated areas (i.e., roads, landings, designated skid trails), and limiting the amount of traffic from other specialized equipment off designated areas. Harvester shears will be authorized to operate off designated skid trails at 30 foot intervals and make no more than two equipment passes on any site specific area to accumulate materials.
- Use of directional felling techniques from pre-approved skid trails, and suspending the leading end of logs during skidding operations.
- Avoid equipment operations during periods of high soil moisture, as evidenced by equipment tracks that sink deeper than dry or frozen conditions.
- Operate equipment over frozen ground or a sufficient amount of compacted snow to protect mineral soil. Equipment operations should be discontinued when frozen ground begins to thaw or when there is too little compacted snow and equipment begins to cause soil puddling damage (rutting).
- Use old landings and skidding networks whenever possible. Assure that water control structures are installed and maintained on skid trails that have gradients of 10 percent or more. Ensure erosion control structures are stabilized and working effectively (LRMP SL-1; Timber Management BMP T-16, T-18).
- In all proposed activity areas, locations for new yarding and transportation systems would be designated prior to the logging operations. This includes temporary roads, spur roads, log landings, and primary (main) skid trail networks. (LRMP SL-1 & SL-3; Timber Management BMP T-11, T-14 & T-16).
- Surface drainage on temporary roads – minimize the erosive effects of concentrated water through the proper design and construction of temporary roads (Road BMP R-7).
- Road maintenance – conduct regular preventive maintenance to avoid deterioration of the road surface and minimize the effects of erosion and sedimentation (Road BMP R-18, R-19).
- Coarse woody debris/down wood – assure that on Ponderosa Pine sites, a minimum of 5 to 10 tons per acres of large woody debris (greater than 3 inches in diameter) is retained within activity areas to provide organic matter reservoirs for nutrient cycling that helps maintain long-term site productivity (LRMP SL-1). Assure that on Mixed Conifer sites, a minimum of 10 to 15 tons per acres (greater than 3 inches in diameter) is retained for long-term nutrient cycling.
- Use sale area maps for designating soil and water protection needs (Timber Management BMP T-4).

Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Standards and Guidelines

A Northwest Forest Plan Late Successional Reserve standard and guideline consistency report was prepared for review by the Regional Ecosystem Office (REO). The report addressed standards and guidelines listed in Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl: Guidelines for Salvage: C-13 through C16 (USDA 1994).

The interagency LSR Work Group review concluded that the proposed treatments in LSRs meet the objectives for managing LSRs. This conclusion was reached in part for the following reasons:

- A combination of local and provincial information and references was used to determine levels and distribution of dead wood within salvage units (C-13 through C-15). Dead wood retention levels in LSR treatment units meet or exceed guidelines specified in the Whychus LSRA.
- Guidelines for dead wood retention leave the most persistent size classes and species; the species composition of the largest dead wood would approximate the original stand (C-14, C-15). The DECAID tool was considered in the analysis.
- Approximately 2,272 acres (92 percent) of the Black Crater Fire acres within the fire perimeter in LSR would remain in an unsalvaged post-fire condition.
- On approximately 194 acres, the trees to be salvaged include dead trees of species other than ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, along with low-probability of survival white fir and lodgepole pine. Low-probability of survival trees and prescribed snag levels will be left to meet LSRA guidelines for retention of large snags and to provide structural characteristics suitable for associated species. (C-14).
- No coarse woody debris existing prior to the fire would be removed. Within salvage units, coarse woody debris levels are consistent with that described by plant association group (fire climax) in the Whychus LSRA. (C-14, C-15).
- Reforestation treatments will increase the restoration rate of late-successional forest habitat by planting trees of desirable species in areas with scarce or absent seed sources. Without such treatments, it is projected that desired stand characteristics for late-successional conditions would not develop or be significantly retarded, with respect to species composition, stocking levels, and ability to sustain low-intensity fires.
- Salvage would only occur in openings greater than 10 acres, and in areas with less than 40 percent canopy closure (C-14).
- There are no proposed treatment units within suitable northern spotted owl habitat or late-successional forests (not to be confused with LSRs). The proposed action will not result in the degradation of suitable northern spotted owl habitat or other late-successional conditions (C-13).
- All of the LSR treatments recommended for this project are designed to meet LSR objectives and promote the development of late-successional conditions in LSR acres burned in the fire (C-14).

Based upon the interagency REO LSR Work Group's review and conclusions, the REO concurs with the Deschutes National Forest's conclusion that salvage activities proposed in the Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project are consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan.

The consistency report and Letter of Concurrence are included as part of the project file.

The project **will not** treat Riparian Reserves.

Other Planning Documents

The project is referenced to the Whychus Late Successional Reserve Assessment (LSRA) and the Whychus Watershed Analysis (WA). Recommendations and findings in the LSRA were incorporated into project planning. The WA was used to assess background ecological conditions. A Roads Analysis is not required for this project.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project public scoping letter was mailed on October 5, 2006 to about 370 people, including the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. Eleven replies were received; seven from individuals and four from various organizations or governmental entities, including Ochoco Lumber Company, Cascadia Wildlands Project, Oregon Wild, the Sierra Club-eastern Oregon Chapter, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. Comments were reviewed to identify any significant issues. No substantive issues were identified but comments relative to the Proposed Action were incorporated into project design and mitigations.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

My decision is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended by the Record of Decision for Amendments to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (Northwest Forest Plan).

Proposed salvage activities are consistent with riparian and water goals as outlined in the Deschutes LRMP, as well as aquatic objectives outlined in the Decision to Clarify Provisions Relating to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (2004 ROD Amendment to the NWFP). The project is also consistent with the Clean Water Act and Executive Orders 11988, 11990, and 12088.

Management Indicator Species (MIS) are discussed in the Wildlife Specialists Report. The Proposed Action will not lead to a trend toward Federal listing for northern Goshawk, Coopers Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Great Grey Owl, Great Blue Heron, Golden Eagle, Waterfowl, Red-tailed Hawk, Osprey, Neotropical birds, bats, American marten, Elk, Mule Deer, or cavity nesters.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This Preliminary Decision Memo is subject to a 30-day comment period. Comments and a Response to Comments will be incorporated into a Final Decision Memo. The Final Decision Memo will then be subject to a 45-day appeal period. If there are no appeals, the project can be implemented five business days after the appeal period ends.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to public notice, comment, and appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.5. You are invited to comment on this Preliminary Decision Memo. Your comments will be reviewed

and addressed in a Response to Comments section in the Final Decision Memo. There is a 30-day comment period. Please submit your comments by January 18, 2007.

Submit your written comments to Black Crater Fire Timber Salvage Project, Project Manager, Michael Keown, Post Office Box 249, Sisters, Oregon 97759; FAX (541) 549-7746. E-mails comments should be sent to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-sisters@fs.fed.us

Those submitting electronic copies must do so only to the email address listed above, must put the project name in the subject line, and must either submit comments as part of the e-mail message or as an attachment only in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf) or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf).

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this Preliminary Decision Memo or any other questions regarding the project, please contact Michael Keown, Environmental Coordinator, Sisters Ranger District, 541-549-7735.

_/s/ William Anthony___ **12/12/2006**

WILLIAM ANTHONY **Date**
District Ranger