

**Preliminary DECISION MEMO**  
**2008 SMALL TREE THINNING**  
**USDA FOREST SERVICE - Deschutes National Forest**  
**Crescent Ranger District**  
**Deschutes and Klamath Counties, Oregon**

I have decided to authorize small tree thinning on approximately 2,590 acres in 89 units (maps attached). Of the 2,590 acres, 1,593 acres are managed plantations. The trees to be thinned are not likely of commercial value. Areas included in this decision are over-crowded stands resulting in reduced growth and vigor due to competition for scarce resources. This project is needed to increase the growth and health of these young trees and to accelerate their development into stands that can serve future social and biological needs. It is being planned under the direction of the 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and its associated amendments.

Thinning will be performed by hand with chain or brush saws. Trees to be thinned are generally 15-25 years old and not larger than 6 inches in diameter. Spacing on leave trees will vary between 18 and 20 feet, depending on the objectives for the specific stand. Prescriptions for thinning include spacing that achieves variance to encourage stand diversity. Wildlife habitat improvement and future big game cover are considerations that were incorporated into the design of the project. Overall cover/forage ratios within the project area will not be affected.

Slash from the thinning may be hand piled or removed with machinery in many stands and disposed. Whatever cannot be chipped or utilized will then be burned. Typically, emissions that result are very low due to low fire intensities and the small volume of material to burn. All burning will comply with the Oregon smoke management guidelines and will be performed with an approved burning plan.

### **Location**

The proposed precommercial thinning project area is located on the Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest. Units are dispersed across the district and are located within the boundaries of the Northwest Forest Plan. Legal location descriptions are as follows:

T. 22 S., R. 7 E., Section 5, 8, 10, 11, 29, 32, 33;  
T. 22 S., R. 8 E., Section 16, 17;  
T. 22 S., R. 9 E., Section 31, 36;  
T. 23 S., R. 7 E., Section 9;  
T. 23 S., R. 8 E., Section 20, 29, 34;  
T. 23 S., R. 9 E., Section 7;  
T. 24 S., R. 7 E., Section 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 26, 28;  
T. 24 S., R. 8 E., Section 26, 32, 33, 34;  
T. 24 S., R. 11 E., Section 2, 27, 28, 33, 34;  
T. 25 S., R. 7 E., Section 9, 13, 24, 25;  
T. 25 S., R. 8 E., Section 8, 20, 26, 31, 33, 34;  
T. 25 S., R. 9 E., Section 6, 20, 21, 29, 30, 31;  
T. 26 S., R. 7 E., Section 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 26;  
T. 26 S., R. 8 E., Section 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36; Willamette Meridian.

## Public Involvement

On August 1, 2007, a letter announcing the proposed project was sent to various people and organizations on our mailing list requesting their comments on the project. No responses were received.

## Reason for Categorical Exclusion and Findings

Based on the analysis and previous experience with this type of project, and considering the project design and conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances<sup>1</sup> are associated with the small tree thinning and slash cleanup activities proposed in this project. This finding is based on the surveys, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements designed into this activity. I find that this project falls within a category established in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2 (6)) that does not individually or cumulatively have significant effects on the human environment. Therefore, this project is categorically excluded from preparation of an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

There will be **no effect** to Threatened and Endangered species or their habitats. There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas or Research Natural Areas involved. Archaeological or American Indian cultural sites, floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds **will not** be negatively affected.

This project is consistent with direction found in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan. Biological Evaluations were prepared for Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered animal and plant species and are located in the project file at the Crescent Ranger District. Also, the project meets all of the applicable Project Design Criteria from the Programmatic Biological Assessment for central Oregon.

## Implementation Date/Conditions Related to Implementation

This project is scheduled for implementation starting in 2008 and to be completed over the next 5 years. **The following conditions are incorporated into the decision:**

### Wildlife

1. A contract provision to protect Proposed, Endangered and Threatened wildlife species and/or proposed or designated Critical Habitat will be required in the event of the discovery of a listed species in the project area. A wildlife biologist will review new information and evaluate the information and evaluate the need for seasonal restrictions and/or consultation requirements if needed.
2. To protect nesting northern spotted owls, a limited operating period will be required prohibiting all disturbing work between March 1 and September 30. This measure will apply to Pine Butte #15 and Kumquat 82 #38. If surveys are conducted and determine that a nesting attempt has failed the restrictions will be lifted for that particular year only.
3. Prescribed fire managers use smoke management forecasts in order to minimize smoke entering into suitable northern spotted owl habitat and northern bald eagle nesting and roosting habitat to ensure that dissipation will be adequate during the nesting seasons.
4. A minimum 30 foot no cut buffer will be applied to all riparian areas.
5. In the thinning units all downed logs greater than 8 inches diameter are not to be cut and piled although they may be moved to breakup the continuity of fuels. Leave a minimum to two wildlife slash piles per acre unburned. This measure is intended to provide some level down wood presence in younger aged stands that are lacking coarse woody debris.

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<sup>1</sup> Extraordinary Circumstances, as clarified by final interim directive August 2002.

6. To prevent harassment of calving elk and/or fawning deer, and to prevent disturbance of or injury to young of the year, treatment units within 0.25 mile of riparian areas should be completed outside of calving/fawning season of **May 1 through June 30**. The following units are affected: Hand Me Down #3; Hemlock Butte LP 83 #17, #19, #24, and #29; MJB Bug Salv #1; Gutshot #35, #49, and #50; Plucker LP Salvage #33 and #35; South Paunina LP #35; Mutt and Jeff #10; Davis Pine #10; and N. Boundary LP #14.
7. Activities should not take place within 0.25 mile of an active raptor nest within the reproductive season for that species. Known nest sites that will be affected and related seasonal restrictions are listed below:

Species	Reproductive Season	Affected Units
Red Tail Hawk	March 1- August 31	Rim #5 and Rotor LP Salvage #48
Osprey	April 1- August 31	Moore Rock #12, North Davis Creek #12, and Pine Butte #36

If additional active raptor nests and/or great blue heron rookeries are discovered within 0.25 mile of thinning unit(s), treatments within the affected areas will be deferred until the end of the applicable reproductive season. This condition may be waived in a particular year if nesting or reproductive success surveys reveal that the raptors are non-nesting or that no young are present that year. The waver is good for that nesting season only.

### **Invasive Plants**

8. Provisions in contracts will require equipment used in precommercial thinning, mowing, and grapple or hand piling activities to be cleaned of soil and plant parts before coming on the forest.
9. Infested units are Hamroy #1, Josh Firewood #2, PGT Pipeline #1, and Rim #5. Prioritize activities in these units last, so risk of spreading invasive plants from an infested area is low.
10. Known invasive plant sites will be monitored and appropriate methods to eradicate or control the invasive plants in those sites will be used.
11. Units with invasive plants will be scheduled for thinning and mowing after uninfested units have been completed and ensured that equipment and personnel are free of soil and plant parts. Infested units are Hamroy #1 (mullein), Josh Firewood #2 (mullein), PGT Pipeline #1 (mullein, Canada thistle), and Rim #5 (mullein, cheatgrass).
12. Workers will inspect, remove, and properly dispose of invasive plant seeds and plant parts found on their clothing and equipment. Proper disposal will mean bagging the seeds and plant parts and disposing of them in a way that ensures that seed and propagules cannot spread. The best disposal method will be to burn them in an incinerator, if possible.

### **Water and Soil Quality**

13. Motorized access into units for special forest products (post and poles) will not be allowed off existing roads unless specifically approved by the coordinator or district hydrologist/fish biologist. Project activities will occur outside riparian reserve boundaries.

### **Consistency with Late Successional Reserves**

This project contains units on 212 acres that are within areas allocated to Late Successional Reserve under the Northwest Forest Plan. Essentially, there are two standards and guidelines that apply:

1. Young stands are overstocked to a point where achieving Late Successional objectives will be considerably delayed (ROD, C-13).
2. The objective will be to accelerate development of late-successional conditions while making the future stand less susceptible to natural disturbances (ROD, C-13).

I have determined that these stands are consistent with these Standards and Guidelines and Record of Decision.

### **Administrative Review**

This decision is subject to public notice, comment, and appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.5. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of a notice in *The Bulletin*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to: Chris Mickle, Crescent Ranger District, PO Box 208, Crescent, OR, 97733. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 7:45 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone (541) 433-3200 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to [comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-crescent@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-crescent@fs.fed.us). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period and ensure that their comments have been received. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6

For further information, contact Chris Mickle at Crescent Ranger District, 136471 Hwy 97 N/ P.O. Box 208, Crescent OR 97733, or by phone at (541) 433-3200.

/s/ C. Christine Frisbee

C. Christine Frisbee  
District Ranger

April 28, 2008

Date