

# Deschutes & Ochoco National Forests Crooked River National Grassland

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## Projects & Plans

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**T.21S, R.8E, S 16; WM., Deschutes County, Oregon**

#### Background



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**PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS**

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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



The caretaker cabin and gauging facilities for Crane Prairie Dam are located on the eastside of Crane Prairie Reservoir and accessed by road 4270180. Public vehicle access is not allowed into this area. Currently, the vegetation surrounding the caretaker cabin and access roads is typified by large old growth ponderosa pine in the overstory with an understory of lodgepole pine and small diameter white fir that has developed as a result of fire exclusion over the past 80 years. The combination of ladder fuels and surface fuels, exacerbated by recent pine beetle mortality of both lodgepole and ponderosa pine, makes the area high to extreme for both crown fire susceptibility and fire behavior (Browns/Wickiup Watershed Analysis and Browns/Round Mountain Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (LSRA) pages A-86, A-87).

Crane Prairie Reservoir is an important foraging area for osprey and bald eagles and the large ponderosa pines that surround the reservoir provide important nesting habitat for these species. The Deschutes Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) recognized the unique wildlife values associated with the reservoir and associated upland vegetation by designating portions of the area as Management Areas 3 (Bald Eagle), 5 (Osprey) and 15 (Old Growth).

The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) allocation of LSR overlays the Forest Plan Management Areas and consistent with direction found within the Record of Decision for the NWFP the Brown/Wickiup Watershed Analysis and the Browns/Round Mountain LSRA were completed.

The Browns/Round Mountain LSRA rated this area as a high priority (LSRA 7-40, 7-69, 7-75 to 7-77) for vegetation treatments and the reintroduction of prescribed fire to maintain and provide nesting and roosting habitat for Bald Eagles and white-headed woodpeckers. The objectives of these treatments would be to: reduce understory tree densities to lower the mortality rate of the overstory trees; reduce stand replacement fire risk; and provide for regeneration and accelerated development of future desirable ponderosa pine and Douglas fir nest trees. As noted above, pine beetle mortality of lodgepole pine and large ponderosa pines has increased (LSRA 7-12) throughout the area as a result of existing stand densities which exceed the site carrying potential.

The majority of the 70 acre area included in the proposed action is within Forest Plan Management Area 15 with a few acres each in Management Areas 3 and 5. As noted in the wildlife report in Project File A, the management plan for this Old Growth area focuses on providing habitat for white-headed woodpeckers which require open stands of old-growth ponderosa pine. Vegetation management needs for this species as well as bald eagles and osprey are the same; namely, thinning from below followed by prescribed burning to maintain the existing overstory of large trees.

## Proposed Action

The proposed action is to cut and remove all lodgepole pine larger than 4 inches diameter (dbh); all dead down lodgepole pine and all white fir between 4 and 16 inches dbh on an estimated 70 acres (see

attached map) followed by noncommercial thinning and underburning. Individual white fir trees up to 24 inches dbh would be removed if they are competing with desirable species such as ponderosa pine, white pine and Douglas-fir. The project (3C Timber Sale) will commercially harvest approximately 250 thousand board feet (500 CCF) with an estimated average dbh of 10 inches.

To minimize disturbance to soils and wildlife the trees would be whole tree yarded over snow and/or frozen ground to existing roads with ground-based equipment. All equipment would be cleaned before entering National Forest System lands to prevent noxious weed introductions or spread (Project File B, Noxious Weed Report). Current levels of existing ponderosa pine, white fir and lodgepole pine snags and down logs meet the desired levels specified in the LSRA for this Management Strategy Area (Project File A, page 5) and no standing dead trees or any ponderosa pine and white fir down logs would be removed. All vegetative management activities and prescribed burning would only occur between September 1 and March 31 to avoid effects on osprey and nesting landbirds.

No treatment areas of up to 10 acres would be retained within and adjacent to the thinning area to provide high density wildlife cover and habitat. All nesting, roosting and foraging habitat for the northern spotted owl has been excluded from the proposed treatment.

## Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement because there were no extraordinary circumstances identified by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) of professional resource specialists that analyzed this proposal (Project Files A to H) and it meets category 31.2-12 (July 23, 2003), described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15; and category 31.2-6.

Category 31.2-12 is for thinning of live trees not to exceed 70 acres to improve the health and vigor of the remaining trees (Project File E) and requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. This category was established after extensive review of similar projects by the Forest Service which determined these types of projects do not have significant environmental effects when there are no extraordinary circumstances (Federal Register Volume 68, Number 145, pages 44,598-44,599).

Category 31.2-6 is for timber stand improvement activities such as prescribed burning (Project File C). I used both categories because category 12 does not allow for prescribed burning that is needed to further reduce fire risk and to improve white-headed woodpecker nesting habitat.

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded because there were no extraordinary circumstances identified by the interdisciplinary team (IDT) of professional resource specialists that analyzed this proposal (Project Files A to H).

- The project would have no impact on any proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive (PETS) plant species

because no PETS plants or their habitat were found within the project area (Project File B, Biological Evaluations).

- The project would not negatively affect any proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive animal species. There would be a beneficial affect on bald eagle habitat. The project meets and is consistent with all applicable project design criteria listed in the 2003-2006 Joint Aquatic and Terrestrial Programmatic Biological Assessment for Federal Lands within the Deschutes Basin; therefore informal consultation is complete and no further consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is necessary (Project File B, Biological Evaluations).
- There is no designated or proposed critical habitat within the project area (Project Files A, B, C) and the proposed action would have no negative effects on any Species of Concern, Management Indicator Species or Landbirds (Project File A, B). There is no habitat for any NWFP Survey and Manage species such as great gray owls (Project File A) or mollusks within the project area.
- No treatment would occur within the 150 foot wide riparian reserve adjacent to Crane Prairie Reservoir and the 300 foot wide riparian reserve adjacent to the Deschutes River. The project would not affect any proposed, endangered, threatened or sensitive fish species because there are no ephemeral, intermittent or perennial streams, wetlands, water bodies, municipal watersheds, floodplains or documented overland flow of water within the project area. (Project File C, Fisheries Report).
- There are no congressiona lly designated areas such as wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, inventoried roadless areas, areas with roadless characteristics or research natural areas within or adjacent to the project area.

There are no sensitive or steep soils (>30 percent) within the project area. The use of heavy equipment may create minor levels of compaction and displacement but winter logging over snow and/or frozen ground combined with a limited number of passes and reuse of existing landings and roads would assure no adverse impact to soils (Project File D, Soils Report).

- There would be no effect on cultural sites, archaeological sites, historic properties or heritage resources because all sites would be avoided (Project File G).
- Effects on air quality would be negligible and all burning would be coordinated through the State Forester and conducted in accordance with the Clean Air Act (Project File C, Fuels and Smoke Management Report).

## Public Involvement and Scoping

This project was mailed to a wide audience of interested groups and

individuals on May 9, 2005 in addition to first appearing in the Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions newsletter for the Spring of 2005 . The list of organizations, groups and individuals contacted is located in Project File H. Persons and organizations responding and a copy of their comments are also located in Project File H. A summary of their response and how the ID team addressed their comment or concern follows:

Ochoco Lumber Company (OLC) The OLC submitted a letter dated May 16, 2005 supporting the proposed action. The OLC noted that "... for the small amount of commercial volume planned for removal, it would be very expensive to winter log." OLC also enquired "Why is the proposal not to thin Ponderosa Pine trees over 16" d.b.h. size included as part of your project?"

Response In lieu of winter logging, restricting operations to existing skid roads, "pulling line" and hand felling within the September 1 to March 31 time period would be an acceptable method to protect soils. Removal of ponderosa pine larger than 16 inches in diameter is not needed to meet the purpose and need.

Central Oregon Irrigation District (COID) Members of the IDT met with representatives of COID to respond to their concerns regarding fire hazard and the need to maintain gated access.

Response Untreated areas adjacent to all gates will be maintained to preserve the integrity of gated access and where feasible incorporated into hiding cover areas. The proposed action was developed to lower fire hazard and the risk of a stand replacing wildfire that could threaten existing structures associated with dam operations and the caretaker cabin.

## Findings of Consistency

I have determined that the proposed action is consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Deschutes Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, for Management Areas 3, 5, 15, and the Browns/Round Mountain LSRA, and as provided by the provisions of 36 CFR 219.35(f) (2005), which address Management Indicator Species. Vegetation management activities consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines and with LSRA objectives are exempted from further REO review (Regional Ecosystem Office Memorandum dated 1/27/97, Project File A).

## Decision and Rationale

It is my decision to proceed with this project because it will result in improved nesting and roosting habitat for bald eagles, white-headed woodpeckers and ospreys while reducing crown fire susceptibility and fire behavior. The integrated use of thinning and prescribed fire will also improve public safety and facilities protection, help restore a dry mixed conifer forest dominated by ponderosa pine, and be economically efficient by providing some commercial forest product revenue to offset the costs associated with vegetation management.

## Appeal Rights

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215.4.

## Implementation

Implementation of this decision may occur immediately.

## Contact Person

For further information contact Jim Schlaich. Address: 1230 NE 3 rd, Suite A-262, Phone: (541) 383-4725, Email: jschlaich@fs.fed.us

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9/7/05  
Phil Cruz  
District Ranger

Date

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