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Department of
Agriculture

**Forest
Service**

Pacific
Northwest
Region

October 2007



Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Presley's Twin Project

Detroit Ranger District, Willamette National Forest,

Linn County, Oregon

Legal Location: T12S R7E; T11S R7E W.M.

Responsible Official:

Paul Matter, District Ranger

Detroit Ranger District,

Willamette National Forest

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Decision

The Presley's Twin Environmental Assessment documents the environmental effects associated with a proposal to harvest timber on 1668 acres of the Presley's Twin project area which will yield about 19 million board feet (19 MMBF) of wood products. The purpose of this initiative is to improve growth of the stands and promote forest health, maintain an environmentally sound road network, and to provide a sustainable supply of wood products.

I have decided to select Alternative 2 to implement timber harvest (including thinning, shelterwood, and regeneration harvest) on about 1668 acres within the Presley's Twin project area.

This Alternative will:

- Harvest roughly 19MMF on 1668 acres
- Plant 55 acres of regeneration and shelterwood creation units
- Reopen 3.5 miles of temporary spur roads
- Construct 0.6 miles of new temporary spur roads (roads will be closed after use)
- Maintain and reconstruct 28.76 miles of existing system roads
- Grapple pile and burn 412 acres
- Burn piles at landings
- Broadcast burn 38 acres
- Underburn 41 acres

This decision is based on my review of the analysis presented in the Presley's Twin Environmental Assessment and the comments received from the public during the 30-day comment period.

Alternative 2 will harvest densely stocked, fire-regenerated and previously managed stands on 1668 acres. The Alternative includes 834 acres of final shelterwood overstory removal on shelterwood stands, 52 acres of shelterwood creation, 3 acres of regeneration harvests with reserves, 633 acres of thinning 100-190 year old stands to a canopy closure of about 50%, and 146 acre of post and pole thinning.

Total volume of commercial timber harvested is expected to be 19 million board feet (MMBF).

The timber sales from this proposal are likely to operate over a five-year period, beginning in 2008.

Harvest systems will include 1642 acres of ground based systems and 26 acres of skyline.

This action includes the construction of .6 miles of temporary spur road and the reopening of 3.5 miles of temporary spur roads. Upon completion of sale activities, the new temporary roads will be decommissioned by scarification, seeding, and maintenance of natural drainage patterns.

Alternative 2 will pave about 1.5 miles of the 2261 road to the end of the road.

Alternative 2 prescribes road maintenance and reconstruction activities on 28.76 miles of existing forest roads needed for timber haul. Road maintenance activities will include cutting hardwood trees along roads, felling hazard trees for the life of the road, clearing and grubbing, surface blading, replacing drainage structures, reshaping ditches, and placement of aggregate surfacing. Reconstruction activities will include sections of asphalt patching, subgrade repair,

culvert replacement, erosion repair, new culvert installation, brushing, slump repair, clearing and grubbing, road widening, and crushed rock placement.

Fuel treatments that will occur as part of the proposed action for Presley's Twin sale include 493 acres of the following: grapple piling and burning, broadcast burning and under burning. Prescribed burning for fuel treatment will take place when weather and fuels resemble spring-like conditions which include: fuels greater than three inches in diameter, fuel moistures equal to or greater than 25%, ensuring soil and duff retention levels are maintained at or below duff retention objectives.

Portions of riparian reserves subjected to thinning will benefit from increased diversity and improved stand health. All thinning in riparian reserves is intended to accelerate development of large trees adjacent to streams, provide future large wood input to stream channels. Activities in the riparian reserves will not reduce existing stream shading vegetation or levels of large wood in streams associated with regeneration harvest units. Full riparian reserve areas will function as no-harvest buffers in regeneration units. Carter Lake tightcoil will be protected with a 33 foot no-disturbance buffer on perennially wet streams.

Alternative 2 will include leaving live green trees, of suitable sizes, within the proposed final shelterwood removal harvest units for future snag and down wood creation. The treatment will occur 4 to 5 years after harvest. In the proposed regeneration units, mortality of some of the remaining trees is expected to occur following broadcast burning. Follow-up snag and down wood creation will occur to meet prescribed post harvest levels for snags and down wood.

Slash, slash piles and landing debris created through operations along mainline roads and dispersed sites will be cleaned up to improve visual quality along roads that are used for recreation traffic if funding is available.

Post-sale activities include:

- tree planting;
- wildlife tree and coarse woody debris creation;
- noxious weed survey and treatment;
- fuel treatment
- monitoring (including noxious weeds, heritage, , and wildlife trees);
- precommercial thinning;
- gate replacement;
- erosion control seeding, slope stabilization and restoration; and
- fertilization

A complete list of post-sale activities can be found in Appendix D of the EA.

Mitigation Measures

The significant issue of connectivity and biodiversity was addressed by establishing a no-harvest corridor as part of the mitigations for the preferred alternative.

Stands were selected for inclusion in the corridor because they provide botanical, hydrological and wildlife resources lacking in many project units. Stands in the corridor have high amounts of understory huckleberry plants, scattered mesic sites – which have a moderate well-balanced supply of moisture – and hydric soils – which often develop anaerobic conditions in the upper levels of soil due to high amounts of water. These mesic and hydric sites support unique plant communities with high species richness and include meadows and riparian areas. The proposed corridor has the fewest number of skid roads from previous harvest activities. Soils here are not as disturbed and compacted as nearby areas and they support more surface water features.

Benefits of the corridor include:

- Decreased noise levels due to higher density vegetation (*EA page 16*),
- less human traffic during operations (*EA page 16*),
- opportunities for undisturbed movement by wildlife (*EA page 16*),
- corridor stands provide dispersal habitat for northern spotted owls (*EA page 23*),
- improved hiding cover due to undisturbed hiding and travel pathways (*EA page 87*),
- connects north –south dispersal habitat for northern spotted owls (*EA page 107*),
- enhancement of botanic diversity (*EA page 109*),
- dispersal and genetic exchange that contributes to species viability is encouraged (*EA page 109*),
- biodiversity of plant species through out the project area will be preserved (*EA page 109*),
- development of diverse species composition (*EA page 109*),
- barrier to invasive weed spread by reducing the amount of potential weed habitat. (*EA page 121*),
- connected pockets of hydric/mesic vegetation with riparian corridors and special habitats (*EA page 121*).

In addition to the no-harvest corridor several other mitigation measures will be implemented as part of the proposed alternative. These include replanting the one regeneration unit, snag and downed woody debris creation, limiting snow plowing to protect wintering big game, weed recruitment monitoring, subsoiling to reduce compaction, clean up of slash piles and debris, haul restrictions to ensure safety of travelers on the 2261 road, limits on operations during opening weekends of certain hunting seasons, and mandatory signage to inform public of paving operations and logging traffic. A full description of mitigation measures and those units where they apply can be found in the EA (*EA pages 37-40*).

Decision Rationale

Rational for selecting Alternative 2

I have reviewed the environmental effects which will result from implementation and weighed the issues that underlie each Alternative. A discussion of other alternatives including alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study can be found in the EA (*EA pages 18-45*). Based on the information provided in the EA, including its analysis of the environmental consequences of the various Alternatives, mitigations and design criteria to minimize anticipated effects, I have selected Alternative 2. Alternative 2 was selected because it best meets the purpose and need (*EA pages 6-8*). Alternative 2 also falls within the applicable legal framework, economic considerations and logistical concerns.

1. Improve Stand Growth and Promote Forest Health

Alternative 2 best meets this purpose and need by increasing growth of residual trees in final shelterwood removal units, reducing mortality from insects, potentially reducing wildfire severity, increasing average tree spacing, and increasing average diameter of thinning stands diameter.

Alternative 2 will increase growth of residual trees in final shelterwood removal units. Overstory trees in units proposed for final shelterwood removal are not meeting Forest Plan growth and yield objectives specified in the Willamette Forest Plan (*EA page 55*). The understory below these trees is showing about 40% less leader growth than if these trees were not competing with a remnant shelterwood overstory (*EA page 6*). Removal of the shelterwood trees will release young understory trees to grow. Shelterwood overstories are no longer needed to ensure seed tree establishment and protection. The understory trees on these shelterwood sites exceed 4.5 feet in height (*Forest Plan IV-76*) and the overstory is no longer needed to, “assure that [this] area can be adequately restocked within 5 years of the seed cut,” (*Willamette Forest Plan IV-75*).

Future insect mortality, especially the threat from Western Spruce Budworm will be reduced by commercial thinning prescriptions. Stands proposed for thinning have a low resiliency to disturbance events such as insects, disease and wildfire. The watershed has recently experienced substantial defoliation from a Western Spruce Budworm outbreak beginning in 1987 and culminating in 1992. Commercial thinnings in these stands would reduce competition stress and develop single –storied stands which would both reduce the presence of disturbance agents resulting in lower rates of insect induced mortality (*EA pages 6, 65*).

Wildfire severity will be reduced in stem exclusion stands after commercial thinning by reducing ladder fuels, reducing harvest-generated slash with fuel treatments, and reducing canopy density by thinning the dominant trees (*EA pages 76-77*). Thinning will removal many smaller co-dominant trees which will break up the vertical fuel component and reduce the amount of ladder fuels in the stands. Harvest-generated slash will be reduced. Fire severity will be minimally affected by the removal of overstory trees in final shelterwood removal units because these trees are already widely spaced and the potential for additional drying of understory trees as a result of overstory removal is low (*EA page 76*).

Commercial thinning will increase average stand diameters as well as average stand spacing. Both these changes will improve stand resiliency by giving trees more room to grow, and reducing competition with other trees; especially in stem exclusion stands (*EA page 68*). Increased diameters will result from improved growth rates of remaining trees and by selective cutting of smaller co-dominant trees slated for commercial thinning which will leave a larger diameter class of remaining trees. Larger, more widely spaced trees will be more resistant to crown fire development under normal summer weather conditions.

2. Maintain Road System at Appropriate Levels

Alternative 2 will haul over the largest road system and harvest the largest volume which will provide more timber receipts for road maintenance than either Alternative 3 or 4. Haul routes will be brought up to specified maintenance levels and erosion potential will be reduced before timber hauling begins. If post-sale funding is available, several gate and berm closure devices will be re-established where they have become defective. Restoring the integrity of haul routes and barrier structures is part of the project design.

3. Provide a Sustainable Supply of Timber Products

Alternative 2 will produce almost twice the amount of timber as Alternative 3 or 4. This larger volume will help supply more than one year of the district's share of the Willamette National Forest's assigned sale quantity. The 19 MMBF projected for Presley's Twin timber sales will make a significant contribution to meeting the local and regional demand for timber.

The Environmental Assessment documents the analysis of three action Alternatives, along with the No-action Alternative to meet these needs. I have reviewed the EA, the related documents, and public input. My decision is based upon that review. I have found the analysis to be in full compliance with direction from the amended Forest Plan.

Documents in the project record are available for public review at the Detroit Ranger Station on Highway 22 in Detroit, Oregon.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected Alternative, I considered two other action Alternatives along with the no-action Alternative. There was one alternative considered but eliminated from detailed study (*EA page 21*).

Alternative 1—No-Action

Under the no-action Alternative, current management plans will continue to guide management of the project area. No timber harvest treatments will be implemented. Forested stands will continue to develop under existing conditions and current stand density levels and growth trends will continue. None of the post-harvest projects listed in the EA nor the road closures, maintenance, or reconstruction will be implemented under the no-action Alternative.

I choose not to select the no-action Alternative because it does not meet the purpose and needs identified for the project. This alternative will not improve growth and vigor of stands, timber sale related maintenance of road systems will not occur and no timber products will be provided.

The no- action alternative will not improve stand growth nor will it promote forest health; rather stands will continue to stagnate and die of competition-induced mortality. In shelterwood stands growth of the developing understory will continue to be limited by remaining overstory trees. In

some cases these stands will continue slow progression from a fire condition class 1 to a condition class 2 or 3. Over time, the increasing fuel load could be associated with greater fire intensity, severity, and rates of spread.

The no-action Alternative does not meet any of the identified needs for the project including the need to improve stand growth and promote forest health, maintain road systems at appropriate levels, and provide a sustainable supply of timber products.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 proposes to meet the purpose and need by 779 acres of forested stands in the Presley's Twin project area. The expected timber volume from this Alternative is 10 MMBF. This Alternative differs from Alternative 2 in that it will implement only the commercial thinning prescriptions and not the final shelterwood removal. This Alternative includes 6.51 miles of pre-haul maintenance and 19.84 miles of reconstruction. There will also be 0.5 miles of temporary spur road reopening and 0.2 miles of temporary road construction. Alternative 3 has the second lowest cost/benefit ratio, only 2% higher than Alternative 4 and 14% lower than Alternative 2.¹ Net appraised value of this alternative is about half that of Alternative 2.

I choose not to select this Alternative because of the low harvest volume and lack of treatment in shelterwood stands and because it does not address the need to release the understory from competition which has now fully regenerated below existing shelterwood trees. Leaving these overstory trees on site, would reduce growth of the developing understory. Delaying the removal of overstory trees any longer would result in increased mechanical damage to the understory during harvest (*EA page 55*).

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 proposes to meet the purpose and need by removing the shelterwood overstory on 889 acres of forested stands in the Presley's Twin project area. The expected timber volume from this Alternative is 9 MMBF. This Alternative differs from Alternative 2 in that it will implement only the final shelterwood removal, regeneration harvest, and shelterwood creation prescriptions and not the commercial thinning. This Alternative includes 7.83 miles of pre-haul maintenance and 28.76 miles of reconstruction. There will also be 3.0 miles of temporary road re-opening and 0.4 miles of temporary road construction. Alternative 4 has the lowest cost/benefit ratio, 16% lower than alternative 2. Net appraised value of this alternative is about half that of Alternative 2.

I choose not to select this Alternative because of the low harvest volume and lack of treatment in commercial thinning stands and because it does not address the need to treat high-density stagnated stem exclusion stands.

¹ The cost/benefit ratio is defined as the gross value of the timber divided by all of the associated costs (including logging, road, fuel treatment, and post sale activities costs). The higher the number in this ratio, the greater the timber economic benefit received per dollar spent on costs.

Public and Government Involvement

The Presley's Twin Project has been listed in the Forest Focus – the quarterly schedule of proposed actions (SOPA) for the Willamette National Forest since July 2005 with the exception of a period from September through December 2005. The Willamette National Forest publishes the SOPT quarterly on the web and sends the document to over 100 individuals, groups, and industry representatives.

The scoping letter for Presley's Twin was mailed to the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs on July 30, 2007. No comments were received from the tribes.

As part of the public involvement process, the agency contacted or held meetings with the Boy Scouts of America and the American Forest Resources Council as requested. Using both verbal and written comments solicited during project scoping from the public and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to be addressed in this assessment.

The EA was released for a 30-day comment period on July 30, 2007. Three groups submitted comments: Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands Project, and the American Forest Resource Council. Cascadia Wildlands Project also contacted the district via phone and inquired about the project to clarify their questions and our intent. General discussion with Oregon Wild included the age of trees in riparian reserves, overall type of project and the process for treatment of temporary roads after the completion of harvest activities. Appendix A of this Decision Notice contains the responses to the comments contained in these comment letters.

Comment Summary

During the 30-day EA comment period, three comments were received. Comments were submitted by the American Forest Resources Council (AFRC), Oregon Wild, and Cascadia Wildlands Project. Comments are addressed in Appendix A.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following.

Context

The selected Alternative is limited in geographic context (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). The area of proposed activity is relatively small when considered in a watershed perspective. Significant direct or indirect effects are not anticipated with the implementation of Alternative 2. Likewise, cumulative effects are expected to be negligible and are documented in the EA (*EA pages 67-184*).

Intensity

Ten elements of impact intensity identified in 40 CFR 1508.27b have been considered in assessing the potential significance of project effects. They are as follows:

1. No significant adverse direct or indirect effects to the environment from this project were identified during the environmental effects analysis. No significant irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources, such as loss of soil productivity, water quality, wildlife habitat, or recreational opportunities, will result from this project. As described in Chapter 3 of the EA, adverse effects and the reasons they are not expected to be significant include:
 - Soils – little or no additional compaction or displacement will occur, adverse long-term impacts to soil productivity are not anticipated. Slope stability will remain stable with implementation of alternative 2, as a result. (*EA pages 131-133*).
 - Water quality – A low risk of downstream effects to water quality exists due to the design criteria being prescribed (*EA page 146*).
 - Fisheries – there is zero probability of measurable negative effects to occupied fish habitat. The magnitude of negative effects to fish habitat will be zero (*EA page 163*).
 - Big Game – the cumulative effects on big game in the area are expected to be inconsequential (*EA page 88*).
 - Survey and Manage Species – There will be no effects to Great Gray Owls. The likelihood of negative effects to Red Tree Voles is low because surveys were done to protocol and no active or inactive nest sites were found. There will be no effects to Crater lake tightcoil as a result of this project. All habitat areas have been buffered out of sale units (*EA pages 101-102*).
 - Proposed, Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species – There will be no anticipated effects to the following animals or their habitat: Baird’s shrew, California wolverine, Pacific fisher, Pacific shrews, Oregon slender salamanders and bald eagles. Pacific fringe-tailed bats may be affected if trees which have the potential to be used for nursery colonies are felled as hazards during harvest operations (*EA pages 105-106*). The project is not expected to compromise the functionality of any Northern Spotted Owl home ranges or create barriers to dispersal across the project area (*EA page 109*).
 - Botanical Species – over the next 20-100 years, habitat for the majority of survey and manage sensitive botanical species will be enhanced. Stand treatments proposed in this project should help develop good habitat characteristics including development of understory vegetation, of large trees, snags, and downed woody material (*EA page 114*).
 - Recreation – Any road maintenance related traffic delays will result in only relatively short term inconveniences to visitors. Duration of noise disturbance from any harvest unit will be relatively short. Noise is not expected to be disruptive to Camp Pioneer. Noise from harvest activities should not affect solitude in the wilderness. Effects to dispersed sites as a result of logging are not expected to be significant (*EA pages 166-167*).
 - Heritage Resources – there are no direct or indirect effects expected from this project (*EA page 183*).
2. Significant effects to public health and safety will be prevented by paving the last section of the 2261 road up to the Camp Pioneer Boy Scout camp (*EA page 144*), ensuring traffic control is used during periods of active harvesting and high use at Camp Pioneer (*EA*

page 145), performing appropriate pre-haul maintenance (*EA page 9*), and analyzing and removing danger trees along haul routes (*EA page 152*).

3. The supporting documentation located in the EA and project record provides sufficient information to determine that this project will not significantly affect any known unique characteristics of the geographic area such as park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas such as historic or cultural resources.

There are no park lands or prime farmlands in the project area. All wetlands will receive adequate protection buffers to avoid any disturbance from timber harvest. Road maintenance and reconstruction activities will employ Best Management Practices to protect downstream resources from impacts (*EA pages 23, 44-45*).

Cultural resource surveys, for this and previous timber sales, located 16 heritage sites and 24 isolated finds. All sites will be protected from harvest activities and associated projects. Sites will be excluded from timber sale units (*EA page 183*).

4. The project is unlikely to have highly controversial effects. The nature of potential effects on the human environment from Alternative 2 is well established and not likely to be highly controversial. While the public may perceive some aspect of the project (e.g., shelterwood removal) to be controversial, there is no known scientific controversy over the effects which result from these harvest prescriptions.
5. The project effects do not entail uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. The effects on the human environment from Alternative 2 are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks. The silvicultural methods proposed for this project have been prescribed and successfully implemented in stand structures, plant associations and site conditions similar to those found in the Presley's Twin area (*EA page 66*). The action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because it conforms to all existing Forest Plan direction and is applicable only to the project area.
6. No potentially significant adverse cumulative effects of the project have been identified (*EA, Chapter 3, and pages 66, 78, 81, 84-85, 87-88, 90, 92, 93, 95, 98, 100, 103, 106-107, 109-110, 116-117, 112-123, 126-129, 139, 147-148, 151, 154, 156-158, 161*).
7. This action will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. An appropriate review has been conducted by this undertaking (as discussed in Factor 3). Both previously known and unknown significant cultural sites discovered in field surveys will be protected. Because cultural resources will not be affected by this action there will be no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. (*EA page 161*).
8. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (*EA pages 98, 132*).

For the Northern Spotted Owl: The biological opinion for habitat modification in the Presley's Twin project area is 1-7-06-F-2179. Under this opinion, Presley's Twin timber sale will remove 22 acres of suitable (foraging) habitat. There will be no change to suitable (nesting) habitat. There are no restrictions in the biological evaluation which apply to the Presley's Twin sale.

For other Endangered or Threatened species, there is no expectation that the Presley's Twin project will result in adverse effects to either the species or their habitat (*EA appendix B page 2-3*).

9. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The project is consistent with the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (*EA pages 184-185*).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to implement Alternative 2 is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages IV-2 to IV-44. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for Management Areas 11d, 14a and 15 where activities will occur implementing this decision (*EA pages 12-14*) (*Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan pages 207-209, 227-230, 233-240*).

This decision is consistent with all applicable Acts and Regulations such as the National Forest Management Act of 1976, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Endangered Species Act of 1973, Clean Water Act of 1972 and section 319 of the 1987 CWA, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI and Environmental Justice Executive Orders 11988 and 11990, The Preservation of Antiquities Act of June 1906 and the National Historic Preservation Act of October 1966, Executive Order 12962 on Recreational Fishing, and Executive Order 13186 on Neotropical Migratory Birds. (*EA, Chapter 3*).

On July 24, 2007, the Under Secretary of the Department of Agriculture signed a new Survey and Manage record of Decision Record of Decision to Remove the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines from Forest Service Land and Resource Management Plans Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl that removed the survey and manage requirements from all the National Forests' land and resource management plans within the range of the northern spotted owl. However, since the court in *Northwest Ecosystem Alliance et al v. Mark Rey et al, Civ. No. 04-844, Western District of Washington* has not yet granted the government's motion to lift the modified October 11, 2006 injunction, I have designed this project to be consistent with the 2001 Survey and Manage ROD as modified by subsequent annual species reviews as allowed by the modified October 11, 2006 injunction." Red tree vole surveys have been completed for harvest units in the Presley's Twin project and are discussed in the EA (*EA pages 94-95*). No active or inactive red tree vole nests were located so no additional protection measures are included.

The selected alternative is also consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as described in the 1994 NWFP ROD. In making my finding of consistency I relied on an evaluation of the project's consistency with the nine ACS objectives (*EA appendix E*). In addition I considered the findings of the 1996 Upper North Santiam Watershed Assessment that are relevant to the project area.

As required by 36 CFR 219.35, I have considered the best available science in making this decision. The project record demonstrates a thorough review of relevant scientific information, consideration of responsible opposing views, and, where appropriate, the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Some studies cited in the EA from the last two years include Thompson et al (*EA page 68*), Mellen et al (*EA page 88*), England et al (*EA page 108*), and USDA (*EA page 164*).

I have considered all applicable laws, regulations and policies which is covered in the regulatory framework for each resource area (*EA pages 10, 69,84,114,120,124,149,163, 174,182,184-185*) and will ensure that all direction will be followed in the implementation of this project. I considered the requirements of the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan, economic conditions and analyses, and logistical and operational concerns.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. Appeals can be submitted in several forms, but must be received by Forest Supervisor Dallas Emch, the Appeal Deciding Officer, within 45 days from the date of publication of notice of this decision in the Statesman Journal, Salem, Oregon. The publication date in the Statesman Journal, newspaper of record for the Detroit Ranger District, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Appeals may be

Mailed

Appeal Deciding Officer, Dallas Emch, Forest Supervisor; ATTN: Appeals, 211 E 7th Avenue; Eugene, OR 97440.

Emailed

appeals-pacificnorthwest-willamette@fs.fed.us please put “APPEAL” and “Presley’s Twin Decision” in the subject line.

Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to the email address above. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Hand Delivered

Willamette National Forest, Supervisor’s Office at 211 E. 7th Ave, Eugene, OR 97401, between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm, M-F.

Faxed

Willamette National Forest, Supervisor's Office, ATTN: APPEALS at (541) 225-6222. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Contact Person

For further information on this decision, contact Christy McDevitt, IDT Leader, HC 73, Box 320, Mill City, OR 97360. Phone: (503) 854-4228.

Copies of the Environmental Assessment and this Decision Notice can be found on the Willamette National Forest Website at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/willamette/manage/nepa/current_detroit.html

Implementation Date

As per 36 CFR 215.9, if no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal filing period (215.15). When an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR 215.2).

/s/ Paul Matter

PAUL MATTER
District Ranger

10/11/2007

Date

Appendix A – Response to Comments

A legal notice appeared in the Statesman Journal (the newspaper of record) on July 30, 2007 advertising the 30-day public review of the draft environmental assessment. In addition, letters were sent to interested parties. A draft environmental assessment was posted on the forest website and was available to download or view. It was also made available at the Detroit District Office or was mailed in hardcopy format to those who requested it. Comments were received from AFRC (Letter #1), Oregon Wild (Letter #2), and Cascadia Wildlands (Letter #3). Comments received during the 30-day public review of the draft EA and responses to those comments follow:

Comment #1 – ... we encourage the use of temporary roads to allow for appropriate harvesting systems. These temporary roads can always be removed, or made inaccessible to vehicles after logging operations (AFRC, Letter #1).

Response to Comment #1 –There are 4.1 miles of reopening of existing temporary spurs and construction of new temporary spurs proposed to access harvest units. After harvest activities, temporary spur roads will be waterbarred and scarified as needed. Waterbars will be keyed into the cut bank and have a clear outlet on the downhill side (EA page 42).

Comment #2 – AFRC would like to continue to support the Detroit Ranger Districts’ thinning treatments inside riparian reserves. We encourage the Forest Service to continue to use silvicultural thinning treatments in riparian reserves on future projects to accelerate the development of desired riparian conditions (AFRC, Letter #1).

Response to Comment #2 – There are 220 acres of riparian reserve in the project area. Of this, about 60 acres will be treated with harvest prescriptions to help accelerate and promote long term characteristics needed by the dependent species utilizing the reserve (EA page 134).

Comment #3 – Restrictions on season of operation have a cost to the purchaser and result in lower bids for stumpage. The district is encouraged to offer sales that allow winter harvesting on improved roads or allow for roads to be improved so winter harvesting can be accomplished (AFRC, Letter #1).

Response to Comment #3 – Restrictions on season of operation are implemented judiciously to protect various resource values. There are three seasonal harvest restrictions associated with this sale including:

- Prohibit snow plowing, on the 2257 road north of the 2261 junction
- Prohibit hauling on the 2261 road from Camp Pioneer to highway 22 (Last weekend in June – Second weekend in August)
- Prohibit all operations on opening weekend (Sat/Sun) of the following hunting seasons: High Cascades Buck Rifle, Western Oregon Buck season and Elk season

Not all restrictions apply to every harvest unit so some units are available for harvest when others are not. This area is amenable to winter logging and most units are not restricted for winter harvest as long as the purchaser agrees to complete additional work required to achieve desired maintenance objectives for hauling outside the normal operating season (*EA page 174*). An economic analysis of the Alternatives showed Alternative 2 will generate twice as many jobs in the logging sector and timber products manufacturing sector as either Alternative 3 or 4. Alternative 2 has the highest appraised value of all the action Alternatives because it has the most volume, value, and area treated with the most efficient logging methods (*EA page 178*).

Comment #4 –The Northwest Forest Plan articulates a need to protect and restore large trees, so why would we cut down the very thing we are trying to restore? Old shelterwood cuts may not be “natural” but retaining the large tree structure will provide great ecological benefits... If there is a concern for competition within these stands, then thin the younger trees that lack the qualities that make great wildlife habitat and retain the most ecologically valuable large old-growth trees (Oregon Wild, Letter #2).

Response to Comment #4 – The intent of matrix lands is not to maintain large old growth or natural trees. Operations on these matrix lands emphasize timber production. All requirements of the Northwest Forest Plan and Willamette Forest Plan will be met with implementation of Alternative 2 (*EA page 184*). The Upper North Santiam Watershed Assessment (WA) addresses the need for retention of large trees. The large tree issue is also addressed at the landscape level and is also being met by leaving trees for wildlife and in all riparian reserves on final shelterwood removal units. Thinning the understory to improve growth rates of understory trees is not supported by research or experience and will result in reduced growth rates in the future.

Comment #5 –Ground-based logging, grapple piling, and subsoiling are all very bad for soil. It is better to avoid soil impacts rather than cause impacts and then mitigate them. There does not seem to be clear disclosure about the impacts [the] temporary roads will have on hydrological function in the planning area (Oregon Wild, Letter #2).

Response to Comment #5 – ground-based logging including grapple piling and subsoiling disturbs very little soil and, when properly done, causes almost no soil disturbance and very little compaction (*EA page 17*). Grapple piling requires only one pass of the machine across the landscape, and the machine works while sitting on slash. Extensive monitoring of grapple machine piling operations indicates that little or no additional compaction or displacement occurs (*EA page 131*). To minimize the impacts to riparian areas, a buffer will be established along all streams and designated skid roads and crossing will be required. This has effectively worked in past thinning sales. Unit design minimizes the risks of routing water out of historic flow patterns, by designating skid trails within the timber sale contract. Impacts of temporary roads on hydrologic function are discussed in Chapter 3.10.4 (*EA pages 137-138*).

Comment #6 – Competition and non-competitive mortality are important ecological processes that help develop high quality late successional habitat, such as snags and down wood. Thinning will truncate this process by capturing and delaying mortality thereby degrading the quality of future habitat (Oregon Wild, Letter #2).

Response to Comment #6 – The number of live green trees and snags being left meets forest plan standards and guides (*EA page 21*). In some scenic retention areas this is as many as 10 to 15 per acre (*EA page 171*). These trees will provide legacy structures. Retained live green trees will provide legacy structures, snag, and downed wood habitat as these stands continue to develop.

Comment #7 – Thinning mature forests in riparian reserves is allowed only if “needed” to attain ASC objectives, but all the ASC objectives can and will be attained without intervention, so thinning is not “needed” in riparian reserves, and such thinning is in fact not permitted. Thinning mature forests will in fact impair the attainment of certain ASC objectives like large wood and viable populations of wildlife (Oregon Wild, Letter #2).

Response to Comment #7 – I agree, not all areas warranted management at this time; some are developing needed characteristics naturally. Of the 220 acres in riparian reserves in the project area, only 60 acres (27%) are being treated. Management of the riparian reserves will protect and enhance the aquatic and wildlife dependent species and achieve the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives (ASCO’s) at the 5th field, project and landscape levels (*EA page 147*).

Fire-regenerated riparian reserve stands proposed for entry needed stocking control to acquire vegetation characteristics needed to attain Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives. These stands have all had at least one previous harvest entry (*EA page 124*). Your determination of “natural” stands does not include these previous entries or the management that has prevented fire from naturally thinning the stand in question. It is the intent of the Northwest Forest Plan ASC Objectives to consider all factors that have attributed to conditions that prevent the attainment of the desired objectives.

Comment #8–This project removes various habitat components that are under-represented regionally (due to past over-cutting) and locally (due to the B&B fire and insect defoliation). All mature trees must be retained as current green tree habitat and as future snag habitat. The B&B fire essentially stopped snag recruitment across a large area, which will result in a future snag gap (Oregon Wild, Letter #2).

Response to Comment #8 – For all sub-drainages, the number of snags is well above the 80% tolerance level, meaning most wildlife populations are using areas with a similar number and size of snags (*EA page 90*). Large, high severity fires are part of the natural cycle in Wilderness lands. Any snag gap that may occur in recently burned fire areas will fall within the natural disturbance regime. Snags and dead trees created with the Presley’s Twin project to Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for wildlife will persist over the next 80 years in the project area at which time natural snag recruitment will occur.

Comment #9 –The prospect of the entire reserve system being eliminated on all western Oregon BLM lands should provide extra incentive to safeguard all remaining older forest on the district. The Presley’s Twin EA’s failure to identify and evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project with the WOPR fails a basic tenet of the National Environmental Policy Act (Cascadia Wildlands, Letter #3).

Response to Comment #9 –The cumulative effects analysis completed as part of the Presley’s Twin project considers relevant past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions. For cumulative effects purposes, the BLM’s proposed plan revision is not a reasonably foreseeable future action that I can analyze at this time because the BLM has not made a decision on what they are going to do. The nearest section of BLM land is east of the Detroit district boundary and would not be included in the cumulative effects analysis area. The biological opinion issued by the USFWS concluded that activities are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl and are not likely to adversely modify spotted owl critical habitat (*Biological Opinion page 95*).

Comment #10–The Presley’s Twin EA does not rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives. Our scoping comments suggested a “plantations only” alternative that was disregarded by the Forest Service as it was perceived not to have met the purpose and need. At some point, the Forest Service abandoned its original plans that called for 800 acres of plantation thinning as part of the project (see Presley’s Twin scoping notice). Thinning 800 acres of plantations will generate volume and release suppressed trees without controversy. Alternative three and four of Presley’s Twin are mere components of alternative two (Cascadia Wildlands, Letter #3).

Response to Comment #10 – The EA considered four alternatives as well as one alternative considered but eliminated from detailed study. The initial public scoping record from July 2005, did include 800 acres of **precommercial thinning** of managed plantations. The 800 acres of precommercial thinning was included as part of the scoping notices as it was considered a reasonably foreseeable future activity. Precommercial thinning about 900 acres of managed plantations is still planned with the Presley’s Twin Project as a post-sale enhancement project (*EA appendix D, page 3*). This project will be analyzed for NEPA consistency as part of a separate planning effort.

Comment #11 –The Presley’s Twin Project will remove the remaining overstory trees left from past shelterwood harvests and will violate this standard and guideline of the Willamette Forest Plan to retain 15% of each area associated with logging in matrix lands (Cascadia Wildlands, Letter #3).

Response to Comment #11 – Standards and guidelines for green tree retention as well as leave trees for wildlife, visual and hydrologic resources will be met with this project. 15% of each final shelterwood removal unit will be preserved in green tree retention areas (*EA page 21*).

Comment #12 – The EA never discloses how logging large, mature trees improves forest health by improving stands resiliency to disturbances such as wildfire and disease. The EA has not referenced any scientific documentation that shows how logging older trees that may have experienced western spruce budworm outbreaks will make the stands more resilient (Cascadia Wildlands, Letter #3).

Response to Comment #12 – The EA fully discloses how this project will improve forest health (*EA pages 61-66*). References to relevant scientific information can be found on pages 64-65 and are included on page 188 of the Works Cited. Commercial thinning treatments will reduce tree density by removing smaller diameter, poorer growing trees and many of those affected by insects or disease pathogens. Trees that remain following treatment will generally experience increased diameter growth, and will be better able to maintain or increase the amount of live crown relative to the height of the tree. Tree vigor will be increased and lead to reduced mortality from insects and diseases. The removal of densely spaced, small diameter trees, in conjunction with fuels treatment, can reduce the severity of future wildfires. Canopy closure will be reduced following thinning and will permit increased sunlight to reach the forest floor. Increased sunlight will accelerate understory growth and developments of a second canopy layer of shade-tolerant species (*EA page 64*). This vertical diversity will develop as live green trees which will generally burn at lower intensities than the existing dead and diseased standing snags and downed woody debris.

Appendix B – Proposed Action Map



