

DECISION MEMO

Drift Creek (Alega River) Restoration Project

**USDA Forest Service
Siuslaw National Forest
South Zone Ranger District
Lincoln County, Oregon
T13S, R11E, Sections 22, 23, 24**

Background

The USDA Forest Service purchased 1,280 acres of land in Lower Drift Creek in 2002. Lower Drift Creek has a legacy of morphological and topographical manipulation. The goal of the previous landowner was to drain wetlands for agricultural and forestry pursuits. Wetland conversion to dry land for these purposes could not be sustained without consistent annual effort. Economic viability for these efforts significantly reduced the value of the land for those purposes over the past 10 to 20 years. In 2004, a team was convened to research the natural and human history of the area, while working with local stakeholders to recommend restoration activities for the area. The goal of the Drift Creek Restoration Project is to re-establish estuarine and freshwater wetlands and channels. Three phases of implementation were recommended. This decision deals with the first phase which restores hydrologic and ecologic function, focusing on connections between Drift Creek, its tributaries, and the purchased land.

Decision

I have decided to restore terrestrial and aquatic habitat in the Lower Drift Creek area by the following actions:

- Restore tidal flows and connections between Drift Creek, its estuary, and tributary habitats. This includes breaching levees, recreating stream channels, and removing a dike, culverts, a waste area, road fill, and tile drains.
- Reducing the effects of past land reclamation projects and activities on hydrologic processes. This includes road improvement, wood placement, restoring borrow pits, removing a concrete pad, breaching levees, and removing a dike, culverts, and tile drains.
- Reducing the effects of the road system on Drift Creek, its tributaries and riparian or wetland areas. This includes removing road fill, installing a gate, seasonally closing a road, temporarily closing a road.
- Reducing the effects of non-native or invasive plant species on hydrologic and ecologic function. This includes mowing, burning, and creating artificial topographic features such as landslides, hummocks, and terraces.
- Retaining or improving recreation opportunities. This includes road improvement, continued walk-in access, and improving a parking area.

Since the entire area has been disturbed by previous activities, no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause these actions to have significant effects. Therefore, these actions are categorically excluded from documentation in either an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. A project file is required. The category for these actions is found in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Environmental Policy and Procedure Handbook, Section 31.2 #6 “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56)”.

Public Involvement

On December 17, 2004, about 55 scoping letters were mailed to groups, organizations, and individuals who have asked to be kept informed of activities on the Siuslaw National Forest. This included Tribal Representatives; Congressional Representatives; state, county and federal agencies; local watershed councils; and environmental groups. On January 11, 2005, an additional 20 scoping letters were mailed to interested parties not included in the first mailing, and the comment period was extended. One written and one verbal comment were received. Comments expressed concern about the potential loss of habitat for small mammals if meadows were converted to forests and a preference for retaining easements for access to public and private property in the affected area.

Extraordinary Circumstances Review

Site-specific conditions were reviewed on the ground to consider if the potential effects on resources resulted in the existence of an extraordinary circumstance, thus precluding the use of the categorical exclusion.

There are no Congressionally designated areas, inventoried roadless areas, research natural areas, or municipal watersheds in the project area, thus there would be no effect on these resources. There are no known American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas, thus no impacts to significant heritage values will result from the project.

Since there will be no equipment operating on steep slopes or erosive soils, no impacts to slope stability or soil productivity are anticipated.

The intensity, scale and duration of effects on proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive species have been evaluated. Considering the project specific design criteria, along with the design criteria and terms and conditions associated with the programmatic disturbance biological opinion issued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (1-7-04-F-1113), and the habitat modification biological opinion (1-7-05-F-0005) the effects on proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive species does not constitute an extraordinary circumstance.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Siuslaw Forest Plan) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDA Forest Service, 1990) as amended by the Record of Decision (ROD) for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and ROD Attachment A (Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Related Species Within the Range of the Northern spotted Owl) (USDA, USDI, 1994).

This project is not expected to have significant adverse effects on minority or low-income populations. American Indian rights, including those conferred by the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, will not be affected. All Tribes that could be affected by the project were consulted. The biological evaluation and cultural resource clearance report are on file at the District office.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36CFR 215. This project will be implemented on or after July 7, 2005.

Contact Person

For further information, contact Karen Bennett at (541) 750-7107 or Jan Robbins at (541) 563-8423.

WILLIAM HELPHINSTINE

Date

District Ranger

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