

DECISION NOTICE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Gauldy Project

USDA Forest Service
Siuslaw National Forest
Hebo Ranger District

Tillamook County, Oregon

February 2004

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DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Based upon the information in the Gaudy Project Environmental Assessment, I have decided to implement **Alternative 3-Private Land Access** Alternative. This Alternative includes a variety of vegetation management actions, and a road management action that closes to public traffic and decommissions some of the existing Forest roads in the project area.

The vegetation management activities include: 1) commercially thinning approximately 854 acres in 30 to 45 year old managed conifer stands; 2) creating snags or down wood and thinning 100 acres in riparian areas occupied by young, dense conifer stands for the purpose of growing larger trees; 3) performing individual tree release by creating snags or down wood on 10 acres for the purpose of growing larger trees; 4) creating snags by girdling or topping in selected non-harvested timber stand; and 5) riparian planting in selected areas some of the streams in the project area

The road management actions would close and decommission approximately 60 miles of the existing 86 miles of Forest system and temporary roads in the project area.

The Gaudy Project Alternative 3 Map shows the locations of the commercial sale units and how the Forest Roads would be managed.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

I am selecting the following vegetation management actions as described in Alternative 3 because in their current condition, the young conifer managed stands will not develop late-successional habitat characteristics in the near future, which is a goal of the Siuslaw Forest Plan. Recent research (Carey, 2002; Franklin, 2001; Garman, 2003; Hunter, 2001; Muir, 2002; Tappeiner, 1997; and Thysell, 2001) shows that thinning can improve the probability that these stands will develop late-successional forest characteristics within the next 100 years. How quickly these stands develop these characteristics depends on how heavily these stands are thinned at each entry.

A. Commercial Thinning: The implementation of the prescribed silvicultural prescriptions, i.e diameter limit, designation by description, and marking, will accomplish of the following goals that would change the existing condition described on page 5.

- Promote development of those trees that have the best crowns and size by reduction of the number of stems to between 80 and 140 trees per acre by removal of the smaller diameter trees.
- Thin to a level that would allow individual tree development and not jeopardize the integrity of stand from being blown down. This level of thinning makes it likely that these

stands would benefit for thinning again in about 10 years to further assist their development.

- Thin to variable densities in the stand with “leave tree clumps” at 140 to 370 trees per acre and from ¼ to 44 acres in size. Create openings of various sizes (¼ to 1 acre in size) that contain 0 to 40 trees per acre.
- Underplant western red cedar in selected areas.

This will be accomplished by cutting and removing the cut trees by cable, ground and horse yarding methods. These methods are chosen because they are reasonable both technically and economically. Thus meeting the second underlying need described on page 4.

These methods are not unique. By implementing the mitigation measures (Design Criteria in EA, pages 2-2—2-10) the environmental effects of these methods, as disclosed in the EA, pages 3-1—3-71, are deemed to be minor and temporary and meeting the first underlying need described on page 4.

B. Riparian areas: Two actions will occur in these areas: 1) In those areas along streams in the commercial thin units that are dominated by crowded young managed conifer stands that serve as buffers to protect the aquatic habitat and water quality from the possible effects of commercial thin operations, some trees will be cut and left. This is needed to increase the size of the conifers trees on these areas to develop a source of large woody debris that is lacking in the watershed due to past management practices that removed this wood from streams. In those areas dominated by Douglas-fir, 10 to 15 trees per acre would be girdled or cut and left on site to encourage the development of 10 large trees per acre and to improve species mix. Work would be done after commercial operations are completed. This meets the first underlying need described on page 4.

The second action will create gaps in alder dominated riparian areas along selected streams and then plant a mixture of conifer seedlings species in these openings. This is needed because the alder in these areas do not provide a sufficient long-term source of large wood because it has relatively small diameters and decays rapidly as compared with conifers. Specifically this action includes existing openings in the alder canopy will be used or enlarged to about ¼ acre by cutting and leaving alder, planting a mixture of conifer species, releasing with chainsaws the planted seedlings from competition with shrubs and hardwoods, and protecting the seedlings from animal damage with tubes or nets. In areas where conifer exist but are overtopped by alder, a few alder would be cut and left. No alder would be cut within 15 feet of streams. This meets the first underlying need described on page 4.

C. Individual tree release: There is a 40-year-old conifer stand approximately 10 acres in size, adjacent to unit 6 that cannot be commercially logged because it is necessary to construct a temporary road through a mature stand. This is not acceptable. However, there is need to change this stand’s species composition and tree sizes because it is adjacent to a mature stand. In time, as the stand composition is changed it will add to the amount of late-successional habit of the existing mature stand. This will be accomplished by focusing on the dominate trees within the young managed stand, by releasing or girdling competing trees within a distance of 30 to 35 feet of approximately 12 trees per acre (or ideally pairs of trees growing within 4 feet from each other). This meets the first underlying need described on page 4.

D. Snag Creation: Up to 4 snags per acre will be created in units 8 and 18 by girdling or removing the top half of the crown. This is needed because the number of snags in these units is limited. This meets the first underlying need described on page 4.

ROAD MANAGEMENT

I am selecting Alternative 3 because it reduces the risks to aquatic habitat from potential failure of high-risk culverts in Forest Road 1588-112. If these culverts fail there is some possibility that the damage to this Forest Road may not be repairable, thus eliminating reasonable access to private land. This alternative allows the culverts to remain in place but removes deep fills above them. This alternative is more favorable than the No Action Alternative, which would not manage these culverts.

Alternative 3 maintains access to private lands in the area, including those of Simpson Resource Company. The selection of this alternative responds to comments made by Simpson during the scoping period and the 30-day EA comment period. Access to Simpson Resource lands by existing Forest Roads is very important to them for both economic and resource protection reasons.

Both Alternative 2--Proposed Action Alternative and Alternative 4--Minimal Road Alternative propose that these roads be decommissioned for two reasons: 1) To reduce the effects on down stream aquatic habitat and 2) Reduce the amount of roads that need maintenance to maintain them in a safe and environmental sound condition. Both of these goals can be accomplished by Alternative 3 and may be better than that proposed by Alternatives 2 and 4 for the high risk culverts in Forest Road 1588-112. These high risk culverts, in these Alternatives, would be removed. To do this, it is necessary to construct short road segments down near the stream levels because of the deep fills over the culverts will prevent reaching the culverts from the Forest Road surface. This would result in greater short term negative effects to the down stream aquatic habitat because these short road segments would be constructed across and down the steep, unstable stream banks.

2. Alternative 3 best meets Issue 2, listed on below on page 4, because:

A. Though the amount of roads that would be open to public travel is reduced, there are a number of roads that will remain open throughout the project area that will be better maintained. This will help to ensure that these roads will be open for a longer period of time than that which may occur from the No Action Alternative.

B. It maintains existing reasonable access to private land. Most of the private lands are steep and near major streams. To manage these lands in a reasonable economic manner roads are needed. To construct roads across these parcels may not be feasible for economic or resource reasons.

3. Alternative 3 addresses the concern of Issue 3, listed on page 4, regarding lack of road maintenance funds to properly maintain Forest Service roads. However, it does reduce the amount of miles that will need regular maintenance by closing or decommissioning some of the Forest Roads.

4. To support the commercial thin operations it is necessary to open 9.0 miles of existing roads temporary roads. These roads were constructed when the conifer stands were clearcut, and then closed. Some of these roads have old culverts and one short bridge. As these structures continue to deteriorate there is a possibility they will fail and cause downstream damage. The culverts and bridge can support log haul without changes to them. Once commercial operations are completed they will be removed. This will reduce the risk to downstream damage.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Since the fall of 1999, the Gaudy Project has been listed in the Project Update, the Siuslaw National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The proposed actions were provided to the public and other agencies for comment during the scoping, starting April 17, 2002 for 30 days. From this scoping method, the Hebo District received 13 comments from the public about the proposed actions. Most of the respondents were concerned about the proposed road closures. Using these comments and internal (Forest Service) concerns the interdisciplinary team (IDT), identified the following significant issues regarding the effects of the proposed actions.

- 1. Impacts to water quality/fish habitat.**
- 2. Access to National Forest System lands for public use, private and Oregon State lands.**
- 3. Lack of road maintenance funds to properly maintain Forest Service Roads**
- 4. Impact to T&E wildlife species.**

To address these issues, and meet the purpose and need, the Forest Service developed four fully evaluated alternatives. They are described below.

The draft Gaudy Project Environmental Assessment official 30-days public comment period occurred in September 2003, ending on October 27, 2003. Oregon Natural Resources Council (ONRC) and the Simpson Resource Company commented on the draft EA. ONRC's comments focused on creation of variability in the commercial thinned units, use and construction of temporary roads, Swiss needle cast effects, retaining damaged trees in the commercial thin units, and the proper use of roads when they are wet. Simpson Resource Company called the Hebo District ranger and restated that decommissioning some Forest Roads would have adverse economic effects on the company. The EA's Chapter 6 Response to the Environmental Assessment Comments includes these comments and Forest Service responses.

BACKGROUND—PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

From an analysis completed in 2001, the Hebo Ranger determined that several actions are needed in the Gaudy Project area to maintain or improve habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species by accelerating the development of late-successional forest habitat and improving watershed conditions. The project area is contained on the Nestucca and Little Nestucca Watersheds; T4 and 5S, R9 and 10W; W.M. Tillamook County.

These actions are guided by the two underlying needs described in the amended Siuslaw National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan):

“The need for forest habitat is the need for a healthy forest ecosystem with habitat that will support populations of native species (particularly those associated with late-successional and old growth forests) and includes protection for riparian areas and waters” (1994 Northwest Forest Plan, FSIES, p 1-4)

“The need for forest products from forest ecosystems is the need for a sustainable supply of timber and other forest products that will help maintain the stability of local and regional economics on a predictable and long term basis.” (1994 Northwest Forest Plan, FSIES, p 1-4)

To refine this dual need, an interdisciplinary team reviewed information in the Nestucca and Little Nestucca Watershed Analyses and information from the field reviews identified the following existing and desired conditions for resources in the project area. It also identified actions needed to meet or implement changes that would, in the future, meet this dual need and the desired conditions. The focus of this review was the conifer stands that are the basis of late-successional forest, the streams that provide habitat for aquatic or water-dependant species, and a road system that provides access to the area and affects various resources of the project area.

EXISTING AND DESIRED CONDITIONS

Conifer Stands

Existing Condition The managed stands (plantations) in the project area were created in the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s primarily by clearcutting. The clearcuts were planted with 300 to 700 Douglas-fir seedlings per acre to maximize growth, and then were to be managed through a series of treatments for timber production. Recent changes in the Forest Plan goals, lack of funding, and court injunctions slowed implementation of treatments. Many of the proposed treatments were not completed.

The young managed stands are interspersed among patches of older aged natural stands. This fragmentation has diminished the amount and quality of the late-successional forest habitat. A goal of the Forest Plan is to maintain and develop, or accelerate the development of late-successional-forest habitat. Recent research (Carey, 2002; Franklin, 2001; Garman, 2003; Hunter, 2001; Muir, 2002; Tappeiner, 1997; and Thysell, 2001) shows that thinning can improve the probability that these stands will develop late-successional forest characteristics within the next 100 years. How quickly these stands develop these characteristics depends on how heavily these stands are thinned at each entry.

Desired Condition For the young managed stands the specific desired condition, over time, is one in which the treated stands have an increased overall mean diameter, increased rate of tree diameter growth and crown development (including large limbs low in the crown and broken tops), stimulated understory shrub and herb development, diverse species composition, increased development of a shade tolerant understory, increased snags and down wood levels in all stages of decomposition, greater windfirmness, and developed trees that could become future sources of high-quality snags and/or down wood.

Streams

Existing Condition Many of the streams in the project area lack the desired levels of large down wood needed to control sediment and provide habitat for anadromous fish and aquatic species. Alder dominates many riparian areas, but alder does not provide a sufficient long-term source of large wood because it is relatively small and decays rapidly as compared with conifers.

The conifer stands near streams in the plantations are crowded, with decreasing growth rates. Without thinning, conifers would develop very slowly or may not develop into large conifer trees regarded as the best source for long-term large wood.

Desired Condition The desired condition is a mixture of conifer and alder in the riparian zone, with a minimum of 10 conifers per 100 feet of stream, to provide a long-term source of large wood for streams and the riparian zone.

Roads

Existing Condition The project area roads were built to support past stand management for intensive timber production, as well as for public access and access to Oregon State and private lands. It was anticipated that the stands on NFS land would be entered frequently, thus providing funds for maintaining the roads. However, due to reduced timber harvest levels on NFS land, road maintenance funding has decreased by approximately 60% in past ten years, and is expected to decline further.

The need for maintenance of the project area roads is directly influenced by the wet climate and steep slopes that some of these roads cross. Without frequent maintenance many of these roads would become impassible. Some of these roads are 30 years old or older, are located on steep terrain, and are built on fill material. These factors combine to increase the probability of failure and the associated adverse affects on downstream aquatic habitat.

Desired Condition The desired condition is a safe, efficient, and serviceable road system that can be maintained to minimize impacts to terrestrial and aquatic species, while providing access for recreation, forest products, and future management. The present road system does not meet this condition. Actions are needed to close, decommission, or stabilize roads at risk in the project area as recommended in the January 2003, Siuslaw National Forest Road Analysis and the Nestucca and Little Nestucca Watershed Analyses (October 1994 and June 1998, respectively).

FULLY EVALUATED ALTERNATIVES

The following summarizes the four alternatives from the Gaudy Project EA.

Alternative 1 No Action

In this alternative, none of the managed stands in the project area would be treated to control density, no riparian treatments would be done, and none of the open Forest Roads would be closed by management actions. Currently closed Forest and temporary roads would remain closed. However, due to a limited road maintenance budget, not all of the roads would be maintained.

Those roads that fail may not be repaired. Those that brush-in would remain closed until they are opened for project use.

Alternative 2 Proposed Action

This alternative includes a description of proposed commercial and streamside thinning, individual tree release, snag creation, riparian planting, and how the roads used by commercial sale operations and those not related to these operations would be managed.

Vegetation Management

Conifer Stands Alternative 2 would reduce the number of stems in young, managed conifer stands by commercial thinnings, and other stand treatments. Table 2-3 shows the proposed stand treatment methods, acres, implementation dates, and Management or Designated project areas where they would occur.

Table 2-3: Description of Alternative 2

Acres	Stand Age (years)	Treatment Type	Acres within Forest Plan Land Allocations	Implementation date
854	30-45	Commercial thin	AMA: 490 LSR: 374 Riparian Reserve: 465	2003-2008
100	30-45	Streamside thin	Riparian Reserve	2006-2010
10	30-45	Individual Tree Release	LSR	2004-2009
N/A	30-45	Snag creation	LSR	2004-2010

Commercial Thinning

Alternative 2 would treat approximately 854 acres in 18 units. The stands proposed for treatment are densely stocked and lack a diverse structure.

Stand management goals for these units are:

- Promote development of those trees that have the best crowns and size by reduction of the number of stems to between 80 and 140 trees per acre by removal of the smaller diameter trees.
- Thin to a level that would allow individual tree development and not jeopardize the integrity of stand from being blown down. This level of thinning makes it likely that these stands would benefit for thinning again in about 10 years to further assist their development.
- Thin to variable densities in the stand with “leave tree clumps” at 140 to 370 trees per acre and from ¼ to 44 acres in size. Create openings of various sizes (¼ to 1 acre in size) that contain 0 to 40 trees per acre.
- Underplant western red cedar in selected areas.

Areas with a low to moderate risk of windthrow would be thinned using diameter limit prescriptions (all trees in certain size ranges would be harvested, trees above and below those sizes would be left). Diameter limit prescriptions would be applied to Units 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 20, and to portions of Units 8, and 13. This prescription should result in the stands having highly variable densities following treatment.

Areas with a high to moderate risk of windthrow would be prescribed for thinning with “designation by description” timber sale contract clauses – a treatment where the largest trees in the stand are identified and all trees within 13, 14, or 15 feet of them are harvested. This type of prescription would leave more trees per acre and results in a more even spacing of the leave trees. Stands treated in this manner are more likely to be wind firm initially and should become more wind firm if they do not blow down in the first 5 years following treatment. Later entries can open the spacing between trees farther, further develop wind firmness, and create the desired variability. Units 5, 13, 15, 18, and 19 and portions of Units 8 and 13 are prescribed for designation by description.

Unit 1 has a low to moderate risk of windthrow and currently has the largest trees and most variable understory (mostly shrubs and herbs) of all the stands proposed for treatment. Additionally, the stand is slightly more variable than other young managed stands in the project. The focus of the prescription would be on opening up the largest trees (19” dbh and larger) in the stand to continue their rapid growth and development. project areas more than 30 feet away from the larger trees will be marked to develop clumps of smaller diameter trees.

Unit 10 has a moderate risk of windthrow, while the risk in Unit 14 is moderate to high. Since these stands are in the Adaptive Management project area and outside of the Late Successional Reserves, they would be treated with a marking prescription, rather than designation by description. The marking prescriptions would be designed to slightly increase the variability within the stand while maintaining wind firmness. The prescriptions should result in more variability in Unit 10 where the risk is lower.

Commercial Thinning Operations

To accomplish some of these stand management goals and provide forest products to local communities, a combination of ground-based equipment (skidders and/or forwarders), horses and cable yarding would be used to remove an estimated 12 MMBF/24,000 CCF. Table 2-4 shows which system would be used for each treatment unit.

Ten or fewer individual green trees or snags within the older natural stands adjacent to the commercial thinning units may need to be felled as safety hazards. Some of the larger trees in these adjacent ¹ natural stands may be used for cable tailholds.

¹ Natural stands: Stands on National Forest Land that have not been treated by some management action

Table 2-4: Alternative 2 Units by Logging System

Cable	Ground Based/Horses
Units: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, and portions of 11. Total Acres 766	Units: portions of 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11 and 20. Total Acres: 88

Streamside Thinning

Project areas along streams in the commercial thin units would not be harvested to protect physical integrity of the perennial and intermittent stream banks, maintain shade, and minimize sediment input from commercial thin operations. These “no harvest areas” areas range from 15 to 200 feet on both sides of the stream channel based on local site conditions. About 100 acres of these areas are occupied by young dense confers. In those areas dominated by Douglas-fir, 10 to 15 trees per acre would be girdled or cut and left on site to encourage the development of 10 large trees per acre and to improve species mix. This work would be done after commercial operations are completed.

Individual Tree Release

A 40-year-old stand approximately 5 to 10 acres in size and adjacent to unit 6, would be treated with an “individual tree release” treatment to promote the development of late-seral stage forest structure. Focusing on the dominate trees within the stand, approximately 12 trees per acre (or ideally pairs of trees growing within 4 feet from each other), would be released by girdling or felling competing trees within a distance of 30 to 35 feet.

Snag Creation

Up to 4 snags per acre would be created in units 8 and 18 by girdling or removing the top half of the crown.

Riparian Planting

Riparian planting would be done in selected areas along the following streams, an unnamed stream: NW1/4 Sec. 31, T4S., R9W.; Woods Creek, Sec. 5, T5S. R9W.; and Bear Creek, Secs., 24 and 13 T5S., R10W. Alder dominates the areas that would be treated. Existing openings in the alder canopy would be used or enlarged to about ¼ acre by cutting and leaving alder, planting a mixture of conifer species, releasing with chainsaws the planted seedlings from competition with shrubs and hardwoods, and protecting the seedlings from animal damage with tubes or nets. In areas where conifer exist but are overtopped by alder, a few alder would be cut and left. No alder would be cut within 15 feet of streams.

Road Management

Table 2-5: Existing Condition and Alternative 2 Road Miles by Road Category

Road Category	Existing Condition/Miles	Proposed Action/Miles
*Forest Roads-Maintenance Levels		
Level 1	3.2	28.3
Level 2	49.0	29.0
Level 3	17.1	None
Level 4	None	None
Level 5	None	None
**Temporary Roads		
Existing	17.0	None
Proposed new	None	.2
Opening existing roads	None	9.0
Decommissioned Roads	N/A	29.0
Total	86.3	86.5

**Forest Roads*—Roads on the Forest Road and Trail System.

***Temporary Roads*—Existing Roads not included in the Forest Road and Trail System. These roads are typically short segments used to access cable landing. They are closed to public travel and maybe re-opened for project use and then closed.

Several Forest Roads would be decommissioned that provide access to about 578 acres of industrial private land and 116 acres of Oregon State land.

Alternative 3 Private Land Access

Alternative 3 proposes ways to maintain Forest Road access to private land. This alternative responds to concerns from the Simpson Resource Company about the proposed decommissioning of several Forest Roads that provide reasonable access to their land. The stand treatments and riparian planting would be done as described in Alternative 2. Table 2-6 compares the changes proposed by this Alternative and Alternative 2-Proposed Action. Access to Oregon State land would be decommissioned.

Table 2-6: Private Land Access--The following Forest Roads provide access to private lands

Forest Road No.	Proposed Action	Private Land Alternative 3
2200-119	Road gated closed, Maintenance Level 1	Private land portion remains gated closed. NFS land portion, Maintenance Level 1.
2200-120	Road gated closed	Private land portion remains gated closed. NFS land portion, decommission.
1588-112	Decommission	<p>This road provides reasonable access to private land and young managed stands on NFS land. The goal, with cooperation of the private landowner, is to maintain this road on the landscape. This road would be stabilized by removal of some of the fill over the culverts, and installation of waterbars. Removal of a large portion of the fill would allow the road to be used in the future and reduce the risk of down stream damage if the culverts do fail. The road would be closed to public travel.</p> <p>Removal of the culverts was deemed too expensive and may result in undesirable effects on aquatic resources because the fills are deep, and would require construction of short road segments down and across steep stream banks to reach and remove the culverts.</p>
1533-113	Road closed, Maintenance. Level 1	Would be the same as the proposed action (Alternative 2).
1588-120	Decommission the portion across NFS land	Portion across NFS would be managed under a Road Use Permit to the private landowner. The road would be closed to public travel.

Alternative 4 Minimal Road System

In this Alternative only the Key Forest Roads 1500 and 1533 would remain open for public travel for high clearance vehicles only (Maintenance Level 2). The remaining open Forest roads that access private and Oregon state land across National Forest System Land would be decommissioned. The stand treatments and riparian planting would be done as described in Alternative 2.

TABLE 2-7: COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

This table displays a comparison of the results of the various proposed actions of the fully evaluated alternatives.

	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Private Land Access	Alternative 4 Minimal Road System
Vegetation Management				
Commercial Thinning--Acres	0	854	854	854
Stream Side Thinning--CWD creation- Estimated Acres	0	100	100	100
Individual Tree Release--Acres	0	10	10	10
Riparian Planting –Estimated Acres	0	10	10	10
Logging/Road Use				
Ground skidding/horse (acres)	0	88	88	88
Skyline Yarding (acres)	0	766	766	766
Temporary Road Construction (miles)	0	.2	.2	.2
Specified Road Construction (miles)	0	0	0	0
Specified Road Reconstruction (miles)	0	0	0	0
Existing temporary roads that would be opened (miles)	0	9.0	9.0	9.0
Road Management				
Miles of Forest Road Decommissioned	0	*12.0	*10.0	*52.2
Miles of Forest Road open to public use	66.1	29.0	29.0	17.1
Miles of Forest Road retained on the Forest Service System, Maintenance. Level 1.	3.2	28.3	30.3	0
Miles of Road on the landscape, but managed under Road Use Permits.	0	0	3.0	0
Existing Temporary Road miles	17.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Private land access	No change	Eliminated	Maintained	Eliminated
Oregon State land access	No change	Eliminated	Eliminated	Eliminated
30 to 45 year old stand acres that may not be treated due road decommissioning	N/A	542	393	1,089

*Excludes existing and proposed temporary roads, because they are considered decommissioned

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT FULLY EVALUATED.

The other Alternatives considered but not fully evaluated were:

No Commercial Thinning Alternative

Trees would be cut and left on site. No road construction or opening of existing roads is needed. To ensure that bark beetles do not damage the stand, 4 to 6 trees per acre would be cut in four-year intervals. It would take 120 to 130 years to reach the desired condition. This alternative assumes that funding would remain available at a consistent level.

Discussion: This alternative responds to issues 2--Impacts to Water Quality/Fish Habitat and 3--Road Maintenance Funds, by avoiding logging and road use. This alternative was dropped because it does not meet the need for action of developing late-successional forest habitat characteristics in the young managed stands in a timely manner. Ongoing research indicates that thinning dense stands at a young age over a relatively short time to low densities is the best treatment method to develop multi-layered stands with a good species composition mix that would support biodiversity. This alternative does not do this. By the time the target density per acre is achieved, the trees may be mature, but the stands would lack late-successional characteristics. It also does not meet the second part of the dual road maintenance funds need for action to provide forest products.

Helicopter Yarding in all Stands Alternative

This alternative differs from the Proposed Action by the use of a helicopter to remove the trees cut in all units.

Discussion: This alternative responds to issues 1 – Impacts to Water Quality/Fish Habitat and 3. – Road Maintenance Funds. This alternative dropped because:

- a. The forest product manufacturing industry, in recent discussions, states the use of helicopters is not realistic in the near future for projects similar to this because of rising fuel costs and lower wood product values for small diameter wood. The economic efficiency of helicopters versus conventional methods may not be realized for years, if it at all. This alternative, then, does not meet the need for action of providing forest products in a reasonable and environmentally sound manner.
- b. To prevent adverse impacts to T&E wildlife species, the helicopter-operating season would be restricted to October 1 through December 31. Experience indicates that operating a helicopter in the Coast Range during the winter months is not economically feasible, because of limited flying days due to rain, fog and wind.
- c. With the need to restrict logging to only being done in the winter, the cost to upgrade the roads for winter haul would be prohibitive.

All Project Actions Completed outside T&E Birds nesting seasons Alternative.

This alternative responds to Issue 3. – Road Maintenance Funds. The intent of this alternative is to reduce disturbance to the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet and bald eagle during the nesting season. All activities would be done October through December. To minimize potential adverse effects to aquatic habitats, all roads associated with commercial thinning must be substantially improved to support winter season log hauling. This would include upgrading all the road surfaces with gravel, and installation of various devices to control sedimentation. No ground based or horse logging would be done, all units would be cable logged.

Discussion: This alternative dropped because:

- a. The costs to improve the roads, and install and maintain improvements to protect aquatic habitat would be prohibitively high.
- b. Removal of culverts and associated fills is required to be done during July through September to protect aquatic resources. This alternative means that some of the work needed to decommission roads would not be done, and if these areas fail may affect adversely affect downstream aquatic habitat.

Alternative to Delay Noise Producing Activities until August 6

This alternative responds to Issue 3. – Road Maintenance Funds. This alternative differs from the Proposed Action by doing the commercial thin and road decommissioning operations from August 6 through October 31.

Discussion: This alternative was dropped because:

1. The shortened operating season may make commercial thinning operations infeasible.
2. The season in which culverts and their associated fills could be removed is substantially reduced and would significantly raise the costs of completing the road decommissioning activities.
3. This alternative would not completely remove disturbance effects. It may lessen it, but because the effects of disturbance and its influence on the dynamics of the affected populations are not known, it is difficult to determine exactly what the differences in effects would be between this alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative.
4. The proposed actions, if implemented, are not unique. Actions similar to these have and are being implemented across these species habitats. Monitoring indicates significant effects are not occurring.
5. The amount of area that may be affected by the proposed actions is very small when compared to these species large population areas.

No Vegetative Treatments in Riparian Reserves Alternative

In this alternative, no vegetation treatments would be done in these Reserves. This alternative responds to Issues 1 – Impacts to Water Quality/Fish Habitat and 3. – Road Maintenance Funds.

Discussion: This alternative dropped because:

- a. The total area that may be commercially thinned outside Reserves is about 400 acres. However, this acreage consists of small areas scattered throughout the Gaudy project area, which makes them economically infeasible to do. This may result in many stands not reaching the desired conditions.
- b. Actions similar to the proposed have been done across the Siuslaw National Forest. Monitoring shows they can be done with minimal effects.

6. Variable Density Commercial Thinning Alternative

The Coast Range Association submitted a comment that suggests that recent research indicates that variable density thinnings may accelerate the development of late-successional characteristics better than the proposed actions.

Discussion: This alternative dropped because variable density thinning is being implemented where ever feasible in all of the action alternatives. However, some of the commercial stands proposed for thinning are very crowded, with small crown and root development. Doing variable thinnings at the rate suggested by the information submitted by the Coast Range Association, may result in these stands blowing down, which does not meet the Forest Plan goals of protection and enhancement of late-successional forest habitat.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

After considering the environmental effects described in the Gauldy Project Environmental Assessment, I have determined that the proposed 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:

A. Context

The proposed actions are small in scope. These are the only actions planned in the project area on National Forest Land for at least 10 years. These actions are not unique. They have been done many times on the Hebo Ranger District, and Siuslaw National Forest. The effects of the actions are very small in terms of society as a whole. These actions affect a very small portion of the Hebo Ranger District; about 1,000 acres of 156,000 acres, and the effects discussed in the Gauldy Project Environmental Assessment (EA) would not result in an irreversible comment of any environmental components.

B. Intensity

This refers to the severity of impact(s). The evaluation of intensity, per CFR 1508.27, includes an analysis of the following factors:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal Agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Discussion: The effects of the proposed actions are discussed on pages 3-1—3-71 of the Environmental Assessment. In summary, these effects have been found to be within the Siuslaw Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines; various associated documents; and existing Federal, State, and local laws and regulations. The anticipated short term impacts as described in the EA, pages 3-1—3-71 are outweighed by the positive long effects to the managed conifer stands, streams and roads. Since, these effects are small in context, temporary and the mitigation measures, (EA pages 2-2—2-10), will be successful, I find that the effects of the actions are not significant. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the actions.

2. The degree to which the proposed actions affects public health or safety.

Discussion: There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because these proposed actions are temporary and not unique. A positive result of the proposed road management actions will be a safe Forest Road system. (EA, page 1-6)

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas.

Discussion: There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because none occur in the project area.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Discussion: The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (see EA pages 3-68-3-71).

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Discussion: We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 3-1—3-71).

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Discussion: The proposed actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because these are the only actions planned in the project area on National Forest Land for at least 10 years. Implementation of the proposed actions does not require initiation of other actions to support them in the long term. (See EA pages 3-1—3-71)

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

Discussion: The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 3-1—3-71).

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Discussion: A survey for cultural and historic resources was done in 2001 and 2002. None were found, as documented in the Pre-Project Heritage Resource Inventory, Gaudy Project Timber Sale, Report # 02/01/02, April 17, 2002. No districts, scientific resources, highways, or structures will be affected.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Discussion: 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, because:

Terrestrial

The threatened or endangered terrestrial species in the project area are marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, and northern bald eagle. Because the area is forested, it does not contain habitat for the snowy plover, California brown pelican, Oregon silverspot butterfly, Nelson's checker mallow or western lily, the proposed actions would have no effect on these species. The effects determinations on the listed species are:

The following is summarized from the *Biological Assessment—For the Gaudy Thin and Road Stabilization Projects, Siuslaw National Forest, Hebo Ranger District, May 22, 2002 and Biological Opinion—Formal and Informal consultation on the Gaudy Thin and Road Stabilization Projects within the Hebo Ranger District of the Siuslaw National Forest, (File Code: 2670) [FWS reference 1-702-F-744), October 11, 2002*, concurred with the determinations in the Biological Assessment. The Biological Assessment and Biological Opinion considered the effects of the Alternative 2--Proposed Action Alternative. However, as disclosed in the EA, page 3-45 the changes indicated by Alternative 3 are minor and do not change the following effects determinations.

Bald Eagle

Thinnings:

Disturbance--The nearest known bald eagle nest is located on private land approximately two miles from the nearest thinning treatment unit. There are an estimated 107 acres of suitable bald eagle habitat within one quarter mile of a proposed thinning unit and/or an associated haul route. Activities that generate noise above the ambient level may be implemented after July 7. The Gaudy Project *May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the bald eagle based upon the potential for disturbance.

Habitat Modification--Based upon design features of the proposed Gaudy Thin Project, there are no impacts expected to the elements of bald eagle habitat. Therefore, the Gaudy Thin Project has been determined to be of *No Effect* upon the bald eagle based upon habitat modification.

Road Stabilization:

Disturbance-- Although the nearest known bald eagle nest is located approximately two miles from the nearest road segment to be stabilized there are 163 acres of suitable bald eagle habitat within one quarter mile of a road or road segment proposed for stabilization. Based upon these facts, the road stabilization project *May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the bald eagle based upon the potential impacts resulting from disturbance.

Habitat Modification--Based upon the nature of the proposed Road Stabilization Project there are no impacts to the elements of bald eagle habitat. Therefore, the Road Stabilization Project has been determined to be of *No Effect* on the bald eagle.

Marbled Murrelets

Thinnings:

Disturbance-- Since there is suitable murrelet habitat within one quarter mile of the treatment units and along the haul route, and some harvest operations and hauling may occur during the breeding season there is potential for impacts to nesting murrelets as a result of disturbance. However, it is difficult to quantify these effects because the older stands have not been surveyed and the effects of disturbance are not fully understood. Generally it is expected that those activities, which would occur in the later part of the murrelet critical, breeding period (July 8 - August 5), *May Affect - Likely to Adversely Affect* the murrelet. Those activities that would occur during the murrelet non-critical breeding period (August 6 - September 15), *May Affect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the murrelet.

Habitat Modification--The Gaudy Project proposes to thin approximately 852 acres of 30 to 45 year-old stands that are distributed across the project area in 18 treatment units. None of these treatment units contain trees with potentially suitable murrelet nesting platforms, nor are any of the units greater than one half-site potential tree tall. Therefore, the thinnings is expected to have *No Effect* upon murrelet habitat.

Many of the proposed treatment units and haul routes are intermingled with stands, which are suitable murrelet habitat. Two of the proposed units and portions of the main haul route are directly adjacent to occupied stands of suitable marbled murrelet habitat. Although expected to be few in number (ten or less), it is possible that individual green trees or snags within these adjacent stands of suitable murrelet habitat would need to be felled as safety hazards. It is also possible that some of these trees would contain potentially suitable murrelet nesting platforms, or be adjacent to and providing cover for potentially suitable nest trees. Therefore the Gaudy Project *May Affect - Likely to Adversely Affect* the marbled murrelet as a result of habitat modification, based upon the potential for up to ten individual trees within adjacent stands of suitable habitat being identified as safety hazards and consequently felled.

Road Stabilization:

Designated Critical Habitat--Portions of the Gaudy Road Stabilization Project are located within the boundaries of marbled murrelet Designated Critical Habitat Unit OR-02-b, however the due to the nature of the road stabilization project it is not expected to impact any constituent elements of Critical Habitat. Therefore, there would be *No Effect* on marbled murrelet critical habitat.

Disturbance--Those activities which would occur as a part of the Road Stabilization Project within the later part of the murrelet critical breeding period (July 8 - August 5), *May Affect - Likely to Adversely Affect* the murrelet. Those activities which would occur during the murrelet non-critical breeding period (August 6 - September 15), *May Affect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the murrelet.

Habitat Modification--Based upon the nature of the proposed Road Stabilization Project there are no impacts to the elements of marbled murrelet habitat. Therefore, the Road Stabilization Project has been determined to be of *No Effect* on the murrelet.

Northern Spotted Owl

Thinnings:

Disturbance--Although there are no known active owl sites in the vicinity of the proposed project area, there is an estimated 2,403 acres of unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat within one quarter mile of the proposed thinning units and/or the associated haul routes. There is a potential for disturbance of this unsurveyed suitable habitat during the non-critical owl-breeding period (July 7 - September 30). This potential for disturbance determination is *May Affect but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the spotted owl.

Habitat Modification-- Although there are no known active owl sites in the vicinity the proposed actions, many of the proposed treatment units and haul routes are intermingled with stands which are unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat. Although expected to be few in number (ten or less), it is possible that individual green trees or snags within these adjacent stands of suitable habitat would need to be felled as safety hazards. It is also possible that some of these trees would be suitable as spotted owl nest trees. The Gaudy Project *May Affect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the spotted owl based on habitat modification, because of the potential short-term impacts to 852 acres of spotted owl dispersal habitat, the potential to fell up to ten hazard trees located within suitable owl habitat adjacent to the treatment units or haul routes, and the expected beneficial long-term impacts of improved habitat in a shorter period of time than would occur without treatment.

Road Stabilization:

Disturbance-- The Road Stabilization would result in a *May Affect - Not Likely to Adversely Affect* the spotted owl because of the potential impacts resulting from disturbance within one quarter mile of a road or road segment proposed for stabilization during the non-critical breeding season (July 8 to September 30).

Habitat Modification Based upon the nature of the proposed Road Stabilization Project there are no impacts to the elements of spotted owl habitat. Therefore, the Road Stabilization Project has been determined to be of *No Effect* on the spotted owl.

Aquatic

Salmonids

The analysis of Alternative 2--Proposed Action in the *Biological Assessment, Gauldy Project, Siuslaw National Forest, Hebo Ranger District, October 22, 2002*, concludes the Gauldy Project proposed actions May Affect, but are not Likely to Adversely Affect Oregon Coast coho salmon. This determination is based on: 1) the proposed action alternatives will have immeasurably low impacts to aquatic systems within the project area, 2) road decommissioning would decrease road-related sediment over time and 3) following the Forest Plan standards and guidelines and Best Management Practices should minimize the effects of management activities on aquatic systems. In their *Biological Opinion—United States Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Region, Gauldy Project, U. S. Forest Service, Siuslaw National Forest, Nestucca River Basin, Tillamook County, Oregon, December 11, 2002*, NOAA Fisheries concurs with this determination.

Analysis of Alternative 3 was completed in October 2003, to determine if consultation on this Alternative is needed. Based upon this analysis, documented in the letter, *Changes to Gauldy Project, December 1, 2003*, implementation of Alternative 3 does not change the effects to coho salmon identified in the Biological Assessment for the Proposed Action. Thus, re-initiation of consultation is not required.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Discussion: The proposed actions 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 (see EA pages 3-1—3-71). The proposed actions are consistent with the Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

OTHER DISCLOSURES

There are no expected irreversible commitments of resources. (EA pages 3-68-3-71)

Sufficient information is disclosed in the EA to make a reasoned choice among alternatives.

There will be no significant adverse impacts to wetlands, floodplains, prime farmlands, range land or forest land; minority groups, civil rights, women or consumers. (EA page 3-71)

Based on the Nestucca and Little Nestucca Watershed Analyses and the analysis in the EA, I find this project is consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives as set forth in the Siuslaw Forest Plan.

This action will not significantly affect aquatic systems, recreational fisheries, or designated Essential Fish Habitat. The anticipated effects are based on sound aquatic conservation and

restoration principles for the benefit of recreational fisheries, as directed by Executive Order #12962. No further consultation under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is required. (EA page 5-1)

This Federal action has been conducted in a manner that does not exclude persons (including populations) from participation in, deny persons (including populations) the benefits of, or subject persons (including populations) to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin, as directed by Executive Order #12898.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision to implement **Alternative 3—Private Land Access** Alternative is consistent with the intent of the Siuslaw National Forest Plan's long term goals and objectives listed on page A-1 of the Record Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl. The project was designed to meet the Siuslaw Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Standards and Guidelines.

Federal Laws

The Preservation of Antiquities Act, June 1906 and National Historic Preservation Act, October 1966 -- Surveys of the proposed project area have been completed. Archaeological evidence was not found. Consultation with SHPO via the Forest Specialist has resulted in a finding of “No Effect” to significant heritage resources.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 1969 -- NEPA establishes the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation. Preparation of the Gaudy Project EA is in full compliance with these requirements.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA), December 1973 – The ESA establishes a policy that all federal agencies will seek to conserve endangered and threatened species of fish, wildlife and plants. Biological Assessments for plants, wildlife, and fish have been prepared, which describe possible effects of the proposed action on TES species that may be in the Gaudy Project area.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA), 1976 – The alternatives were developed to be in full compliance with NFMA through compliance with the Amended Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (US Forest Service, 1990).

Clean Air Act Amendments, 1977 – The alternatives are designed to meet the National Ambient Air quality standards through avoidance of practices that degrade air quality below health and visibility standards.

The Clean Water Act, 1987 -- The alternatives meet and conform to the Clean Water Act, Amended 1987. This act establishes a non-degradation policy for all federally proposed projects. The selected alternative is not likely to degrade water quality below standards set by the State of Oregon. This will be accomplished through planning, application and monitoring of Best Management Practices (BMPs).

State Laws:

Oregon State Best Management Practices (BMPs) -- State BMPs will be employed to maintain water quality.

The Oregon Smoke Management Plan -- The Oregon State Implementation Plan and the Oregon State Smoke Management Plan will be followed to maintain air quality.

Consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has occurred (see discussion under Federal Laws).

Oregon State Forest Worker Safety Codes, The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Code for Forest Activities shall be met with implementation of the Alternative 3.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE AND APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with Forest Service Regulations at 36 CFR 215. Only individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Notice of Appeal must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

Appeals can be submitted in several forms, but must be received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Regional Forester, within 45 days from the date of publication of notice of this decision in the **Corvallis Gazette-Times, Corvallis, Oregon**. Appeals may be:

- 1) Mailed to: Appeal Deciding Officer, Regional Forester, Pacific Northwest Region; ATTN: Appeals, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623;
- 2) Emailed to: appeals-pacificnorthwest@fs.fed.us. Please put APPEAL and GAULDY EA DECISION in the subject line;
- 3) Delivered to: Pacific Northwest Regional Office at 333 SW First Ave, Portland, OR 97208-3623, between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm, M-F; or
- 4) Faxed to: Pacific Northwest Regional Office, ATTN: APPEALS at (503) 808-2255.

If no appeal is filed, the USDA Forest Service will implement the Gaudy Project five days after the close of the appeal period, which starts on the date the legal notice announcing the decision appears in the **Corvallis Gazette-Times, Corvallis, Oregon**. If an appeal is filed, implementation of this decision will occur 15 days following the date of the appeal disposition.

For specific information about this project, contact George Buckingham, District Ranger, Hebo Ranger District, 31525 Highway 22, Hebo, OR 97122; telephone, 503-392-3161, or Brent Erskine, Hebo Ranger District, or e-mail-berskine@fs.fed.us.

Responsible Official /s/ Jane L. Cottrell Date: 2/10/2004
JANE L. COTTRELL
Acting Forest Supervisor