

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Crane Prairie Complex Environmental Assessment
Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District
Deschutes National Forest
Deschutes County, Oregon**

Introduction

An [Environmental Assessment \(EA\)](#) that describes a range of alternatives to complete vegetative treatments, which will result in timber salvage, the sale of commercial fiber, as well as conducting other resource management activities within the Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District of the Deschutes National Forest is available for public review. The document, which includes a no action alternative, may be reviewed in the Bend/Fort Rock District Ranger's Office located at 1230 N.E. Third Street, Suite A-262, Bend, Oregon.

Location

The project area is located approximately 3.5 miles southeast of Crane Prairie Reservoir and approximately 12 miles northwest of La Pine, Oregon. It is located within T.21S., R.8E., Sections 11-14; Willamette Meridian, Deschutes County, Oregon. The project area is within the range of the northern spotted owl and boundary of the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP).

Decision

I have decided to authorize implementation of **Alternative 3** of the Crane Prairie Complex Environmental Assessment. Alternative 3 is the preferred alternative that was identified in the 30-day public review and comment period notice, published December 5, 2001 in *The Bulletin*. This alternative would salvage approximately 5,600 cunits (2.84 million board feet {MMBF}) of firm wood fiber in eight salvage units covering approximately 471 acres. The area is located entirely within the Matrix allocation under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP, 1994) and within the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) Management Area 8 (General Forest). In addition, this alternative would subsoil approximately 56 acres of existing detrimentally compacted areas to restore soil productivity and hand plant tree seedlings on an estimated 144 acres to restore vegetation and accelerate the development of future connective habitat. Approximately 100 mistletoe infected ponderosa pine overstory trees within and surrounding pine plantations would be pruned to reduce the infection sources and protect planted seedlings. Fuels treatment in fiber harvest areas would be accomplished by whole tree yarding and yarding with top attached, followed by utilization or burning of the fiber residue piles. Fiber harvest is planned to occur in 2002. No new permanent road construction would occur under this alternative. Approximately 1.37 miles of roads within the Crane Prairie Complex

area would be decommissioned under a separate Forest Supervisor decision on the Charlie Brown Environmental Assessment.

Rationale for the Decision

In making this decision, I have reviewed the Crane Prairie Complex Environmental Assessment, its appendices, the associated specialist reports, and scientific reports on fire salvage. I have determined that sufficient information has been disclosed in the analysis to make a reasoned choice among alternatives and no significant impacts on the quality of the human environment have been identified. Based on my review of the above documents, I have decided that implementing an action alternative is preferred rather than a custodial approach to management on the lands affected by the Crane Prairie Complex Fire. Rationale for the decision to implement Alternative 3 is presented below. Information available from past actions (including fire salvage) of similar context and intensity in this area also indicates that no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Of the three alternatives evaluated, Alternative 3 provides the best mix of resource benefits, protection and outputs. This alternative is particularly responsive to the issue of wildlife habitat management and soil productivity maintenance and restoration. Alternative 3 balances short-term and long-term objectives for wildlife habitat by replanting areas within a connective corridor and focusing on the retention of individual snags within the area proposed for salvage. Additional snags are provided in areas that burned in a mosaic pattern outside of salvage units. Alternative 3 retains approximately 34% of the fire in an untreated condition and maintains a larger portion of a wildlife corridor within the burned area to help facilitate east-west connectivity in the short-term. This alternative helps accelerate the development of future connective habitat by re-establishing tree seedlings through planting on portions of the fire that are currently non-stocked as a result of the fire.

Alternative 3 reduces the potential for high intensity fires and thereby reduces the risk of moderate and severe impacts to the soil resource from future wildfire. Overall, future fire intensity and severity would be reduced and it is likely that future high intensity fires would be contained at 10 acres or less per occurrence. The alternative retains coarse woody material to facilitate organic material recycling and minimizes the amount of disturbance by generally excluding areas with tree mortality of less than 50% from salvage activities.

There are no ephemeral, intermittent, or perennial streams, nor lakes, reservoirs, Riparian Reserves, or riparian areas with the Crane Prairie Complex Fire area. The nearest Riparian Reserve is approximately 1.5 miles to the west of the area. Therefore, Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives do not apply. None of the action alternatives would have an effect on fisheries populations, fisheries habitat, or water quality due to the distance from water bodies and Riparian Reserves and the gentle slopes between the project area and these water bodies and Riparian Reserves.

A variety of standard mitigation measures have been included in order to ensure consistency with the Forest Plan (EA Section II, Alternatives Considered, pages 7-16 and Appendix A).

Additional Alternatives Considered in Detail

In addition to Alternative 3, two other alternatives were developed and analyzed for the Crane Prairie Complex Environmental Assessment but not selected for implementation.

Alternative 1 is the no action alternative. No reforestation, fiber recovery, or any other resource management activities would occur in this area with this project and at this time. The ecosystem would continue to change through a variety of on-going processes. This alternative partially addresses the issue of wildlife habitat management and soil productivity during the short-term.

I did not select this alternative because it does not address the long-term objective of restoring wildlife connective habitat between Late Succession Reserves, as reforestation activities would not be accomplished. In addition, dead trees would fall over time and lead to horizontal fuel loadings in excess of LRMP Standards and Guidelines. A wildfire started under these conditions would lead to high intensity, high severity wildfire and lead to an elevated risk of moderate to severe impacts to the soil resource. This alternative would not meet the purpose and need objective of reducing fuel loading to meet desired levels (LRMP #M8-27), reducing the potential for adverse impacts from future wildfires, protecting the Round Mountain Fire Lookout, and maintaining a safe evacuation route from the lookout. It would not meet the purpose and need object of managing vegetation to recover economic value and promptly restore desired vegetation to protect and enhance resource values. It would not meet the long term objective of producing timber and other commodities in Matrix lands (NWFP, B-1).

Alternative 2 would salvage approximately 6,200 cunits (3.20 million board feet {MMBF}) of firm wood fiber in nine salvage units covering approximately 547 acres. The area is located entirely within the Matrix allocation under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP, 1994) and within the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) Management Area 8 (General Forest). In addition, this alternative would subsoil approximately 71 acres of existing detrimentally compacted areas to restore soil productivity and hand plant tree seedlings on an estimated 208 acres to restore vegetation and accelerate the development of future connective habitat. Approximately 150 mistletoe infected ponderosa pine overstory trees within and surrounding pine plantations would be pruned to reduce the infection sources and protect planted seedlings. Fuels treatment in fiber harvest areas would be accomplished by whole tree yarding and yarding with top attached followed by utilization or burning of the fiber residue piles. Fiber harvest is planned to occur in 2002. No new permanent road construction would occur under this alternative.

Similarly to Alternative 3, this alternative addresses the purpose and need objectives of fiber salvage, reforestation, and fuels management. I did not select this alternative because it is not as responsive as Alternative 3 in terms of wildlife habitat management in the short-term. Alternative 2 would retain only 23% of the fire in an untreated condition and would maintain a smaller portion of the wildlife connectivity corridor within the fire to help facilitate east-west connectivity between Late Successional Reserves. This alternative also has a higher potential to increase the amount of detrimental soil compaction and displacement resulting from additional acres being salvaged.

Consultation with Others

Contact with private individuals, organizations and public agencies was made by letter, phone or in person (EA, pages 7 and 47) to solicit oral and written input into project area design and analysis. Public scoping was conducted from mid-September to October 1, 2001 on the proposed action (Alternative 2), with over 100 individuals and organizations receiving a scoping letter. Seven individuals and organizations responded to the scoping letter via letters, phone calls and e-mail. The following is a brief summary of the some of the input received and how it was incorporated (*italics*) into the alternatives.

Individual Comments: One individual phoned the office expressing support for the proposed action with the caveat that large, live ponderosa pine were not included in salvage harvest operations. (*Marking guidelines have been prepared and are used to identify and retain those ponderosa pine trees {greater than 12 inches in diameter} that have a high likelihood for survival over the next several years.*)

Another individual provided the following comments. 1) "First, I am heartened to see you are strongly considering harvesting the recoverable timber for market, and considering improving wildlife habitat." 2.) "Second, in your consideration of opportunities to improve wildlife habitat I hope you are considering using the opportunity the fire has presented you to create some enhanced forage opportunity for big game by planting high value forage species." (*Alternatives 2 and 3 include conifer reforestation efforts on portions of the salvage harvest area. Native grass, forb and shrub recovery has already begun within the burned area and will provide quality forage for big game.*)

The following input was provided from a third individual. 1.) "Using dead and dying trees in the Crane Complex is a great idea. Also replanting is good." 2.) "There are many areas off of South Century Drive that are ripe for fires."... " Why aren't these dense areas opened to perso(n)al use firewood cutting?" (*Alternatives 2 and 3 include the salvage of dead and dying trees and reforestation of portions of the burn area. Firewood cutting areas have been identified within the Charlie Brown EA which is in the immediate vicinity of the project area.*)

Ochoco Lumber Company (OLC): The OLC submitted a letter with the following comments: 1.) "We support strongly your proposed action to recover commercial fiber value by salvaging dead and dying trees. This salvage must be done as soon as possible in order to capture the highest return stumpage and lumber values." 2.) "We support snags for wildlife habitat but we do not support leaving the ones with high salvage value." 3) "As the planning team works to develop a preferred alternative, we encourage them to keep timetables in mind for the various activities being planned. Salvage values for commercial products are greatly reduced with time"... "Keep the project costs as low as possible to insure that you don't create a deficit salvage sale. Markets have changed in both lumber and chips. Make sure you do your homework when appraising for commercial products to reflect these changes." (*Both Alternatives 2 and 3 include expedited removal of the dead trees to maximize value and volume recovery. Expedited removal should also provide increased protection for the fire-damaged live trees that survived the fire by reducing insect populations that build up in dead trees. The district would offer the salvage material for sale in the spring of 2002.*)

Forest Conservation Council (FCC) The FCC submitted a letter with the following comments and analysis suggestions. 1.) "The planned activities are likely to jeopardize the viability of species that find optimal habitat in interior forests, forests with well-developed structures, and forests naturally disturbed by physical and biological processes." 2.) "Dissenting scientific reports (eg. Beschta Report, Everett Report, PNW Literature Review) must be disclosed or considered. The agency must include the impacts to soils and watersheds associated with salvage logging." 3.) "We request a restoration only alternative." (*Alternative 3, an alternative to the proposed action that was described in the scoping letter, leaves more of the burn area in an untreated condition while placing an increased emphasis on wildlife habitat management and soil productivity. Scientific reports were considered in the development of this alternative {EA, Appendix G}. The suggestion to develop a restoration only alternative was considered but not fully developed {EA, Section II, Alternatives Considered, pages 8-9}*).

American Forest Resource Council (AFRC): The AFRC submitted a letter with the following comments: 1.) "Just Do It." 2.) "We support you in your efforts to do what's necessary to restore the burned area of the Crane Prairie Complex. We also support the purpose "to recover commercial fiber value by salvaging dead and dying trees..." 3.) "I cannot overemphasize how important it is in today's markets that you try and produce merchantable sawtimber while restoring the burned areas." (*Alternatives 2 and 3 include expedited removal of the dead trees to maximize value and volume recovery. The district would offer the salvage material for sale in the spring of 2002.*)

Oregon Natural Resource Council (ONRC): The ONRC submitted a letter with comments for consideration and analysis suggestions that included retaining all snags, maintaining large trees (especially those surviving the fire), avoiding road construction, protecting old growth and old growth-related species, protection of species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and providing for wildlife enhancement, restoration, and minimizing fragmentation. (*Alternatives 2 and 3 include silviculture prescriptions that incorporate measures to maintain large trees that survived the fire and provide for snags and green tree replacements where available to meet current and future snag needs and coarse woody materials. No new permanent road construction is planned. Temporary roads would be rehabilitated after operations. Mitigation measures have been identified to protect species protected under the ESA. Alternative 3 incorporates consideration of connectivity for both the short and long-term for a variety of wildlife species.*)

United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife representatives visited the project area and provided input and suggestions on cover patches and connectivity that have been incorporated into Alternative 3.

The 30-day notice and comment period for the preferred alternative ended on January 4, 2002. Four organizations and one individual commented on the EA. The response to their comments is located in Appendix N of the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact Based on the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that this is not a major Federal action that would

significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. An analysis of the cumulative effects of the fuels treatment, fiber harvest and other planned resource activities indicated that the combined effects are environmentally acceptable for soil, water and all renewable forest resources. Based on the analysis, I expect only slightly adverse, short duration impacts from implementation of this alternative. All impacts are limited in scope and intensity and can be considered minor. This determination is based on the mitigation measures (EA, pages 9-13) designed into the selected alternative and the following factors:

- (1) Beneficial and adverse direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the Environmental Assessment have been disclosed within the appropriate context and intensity. No significant effects on the human environment have been identified. There will be no significant direct, indirect or cumulative effects to soil, water, fisheries, wildlife resources, aquatic and terrestrial species with Survey and Manage status, roadless areas, old growth stands or other components of the environment. (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, pages 17-47).
- (2) No significant adverse effects to public health or safety have been identified. Proposed activities would maintain public safety within the fire perimeter by reducing the risk of snags reaching the motoring public, as the area is currently under a road closure until September 2003 (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, pages 17-47).
- (3) There will be no significant adverse impacts to wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, floodplains, prime farm lands, old growth forests, range and forest land, Pacific Yew, minority groups, civil rights, women or consumers. No Riparian Reserves are found within the planning area. No significant effects are anticipated to any other ecologically sensitive or critical areas (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, pages 17-47).
- (4) The effects of implementation of this decision are not highly controversial (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 43).
- (5) Based on previous similar actions in the area the probable effects of this decision on the human environment, as described in the Environmental Assessment, are well known and do not involve unique or unknown risks (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 43).
- (6) This action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 45).
- (7) This decision is made with consideration of past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest land and other ownerships within potentially affected areas which could have a cumulatively significant effect on the quality of the human environment. I find there to be no such cumulative significance (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, pages 17-47).

(8) Based on the pre-disturbance survey and record search of the project area, the project proposal will have "no adverse effect" (as defined in 36 CFR 800.4 (b)(1)) on any listed or eligible cultural resources (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 42).

(9) The Biological Evaluation for the area indicates that the proposed project will have no significant adverse impacts on any Proposed, Endangered, Sensitive or threatened plant or animal species. No designated Critical Habitat for northern spotted owl (NSO) is within or near the project area. No nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat (NRF) for the NSO exists within the project area. The Crane Prairie Complex Fire resulted in the fire eliminating the NRF within the project's boundary. Should any endangered or threatened species be found following sale, the environmental analysis will be reviewed and revised if necessary. The timber sale contract will contain provisions that will permit appropriate protection of any threatened and endangered species identified (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, pages 10, 26-27,38-41).

(10) This decision is in compliance with relevant Federal, State and local laws, regulations and requirements designed for the protection of the environment. Effects from this action meet or exceed state water and air quality standards (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, pages 17-47).

Other Findings

This decision is consistent with the goals, objectives and direction contained in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and accompanying final environmental impact statement dated August 27, 1990 and the Northwest Forest Plan (1994) as amended by the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines dated January 2001. (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 45).

Vegetation management activities are consistent with the Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation published 12/88 and the subsequent Mediated Agreement of 5/89 (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 45).

Uneven-aged and even-aged management systems utilized in this decision are appropriate for meeting the land management objectives identified in the Forest Plan (EA, section III, Environmental Effects, page 45, appendix D).

This decision is consistent with the management requirements of 36 CFR 219.27, including the seven vegetative manipulation requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b) (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 45, appendix D).

This decision is in compliance with Executive Order 12989 "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations". No minority or low-income populations would be disproportionately affected under any alternatives (EA, Section III, Environmental Effects, page 43).

As defined by Forest Service Manual 7712.16a, "Contiguous Unroaded Areas", no roadless areas exist with the Crane Prairie Complex planning area.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Any written appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14 (Content of an Appeal). Two copies of a written notice of appeal must be postmarked and submitted to the Regional Forester, Pacific Northwest Region, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3623 within 45 days of the date the legal notice of this decision appears in *The Bulletin*. For further information, contact Bill Peterson Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District, 1230 NE Third, Bend, Oregon, 97701, (phone 541-383-4701).

/s/Walt Schloer

WALTER C. SCHLOER, JR.

District Ranger

Bend/Fort Rock Ranger District

Deschutes National Forest

January 11, 2002

Date

Published in *The Bulletin*, one time only, on January 16, 2002.

[Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests Website](http://www.fs.fed.us/centraloregon/manageinfo/nepa/documents/bendfort/cranecomplex/crane-dn.html)

<http://www.fs.fed.us/centraloregon/manageinfo/nepa/documents/bendfort/cranecomplex/crane-dn.html>

Last Update: 1/24/02

R.A. Jensen

