

Preliminary Decision Memo

Lakeside Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

USDA Forest Service Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest Klamath, Oregon

Decision and Rationale

I have decided to authorize reduction of hazardous fuel loadings and ladder fuels in the Lakeside Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project area. This will be accomplished through small diameter thinning (3 inches or less), pile burning or utilization, and trimming of lower limbs on trees on approximately 640 acres. The project area is located within Klamath County in the Crescent and Upper Deschutes Watershed, in T22S, R06E, sec. 9, 8, 7; T23S, R06E, sec. 14, 15, 23; and T24S, R06E sec. 15, 16, 21. The primary access to the project area is Highway 58. The surrounding area is a complex pattern of National Forest System lands and private lands of various ownerships and uses. Units three, four, five and six are located on the north side of Odell Lake where there are residences, campgrounds, a state highway work center, and a resort. Unit eight is located within the community of Crescent Lake Junction. These communities have been identified as “Communities in the vicinity of Federal Lands at risk from Wildfire” published in the Federal Register, Volume 66, No. 160, August 17, 2001; they are ranked in the Walker Range Community Wildfire Protection Plan (WRCWPP) as extreme. No permanent or temporary roads would be constructed with this proposal.

This is an integrated approach to reduce ground and ladder fuels to lessen risk from wildfire by creating fire behavior conditions that allow for direct attack by initial suppression forces. Ground fuels consist of live or dead vegetation, such as grass, ground litter, plants, shrubs and trees, which contributes to a high rate of fire spread. Ladder fuels are any vegetation or vegetative structure that encourages crown fire initiation, including small understory trees growing beneath larger trees, low canopy base heights and shrubs.

Fuel reduction methods such as chipping and/or utilization will be used whenever possible. When these methods are not feasible, prescribed burning to dispose of piles will occur when environmental factors are conducive and after private citizens are notified.

Remove lower limbs that provide an opportunity (or ladder) for fire to reach into the crowns of trees (lower six feet), leaving at least 50 percent of the crown.

The entire project is within the Wildland Urban Interface as identified in the Walker Range Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The project area is completely within

Intensive Recreation (Management Area 11, Deschutes Land and Resource Management Plan) and Administratively Withdrawn area (Northwest Forest Plan).

Table 1 displays the treatment units, acreage, and treatment types.

Table 1. Fuel Reduction Activities.

Treatment Unit Number	Acres	Treatment Type
3	120	Non- commercial thinning, pruning, hand piling, pile burning, lop and scatter.
4	71	Non- commercial thinning, pruning, hand piling, pile burning, lop and scatter, chipping.
5	49	Non- commercial thinning, pruning, hand piling, pile burning, chipping, lop and scatter.
6	249	Non- commercial thinning, pruning, hand piling, pile burning, chipping, lop and scatter.
8	151	Non- commercial thinning, pruning, hand piling, pile burning, chipping, lop and scatter.

My decision includes the following Project Design Features in order to reduce or eliminate unwanted effects:

1. Seasonal restrictions around active raptor nest sites to reduce disturbance during nesting; activities in all units are restricted from January 1st through August 31st. Activities in unit six will be restricted through September 30th; these restrictions can be waived by the Wildlife Biologist if no eagles are present or nesting.
2. Protection of infrastructure such as fences, spring developments, and water troughs;
3. A minimum of 5 percent of each unit would be retained in patches where no management occurs to maintain diversity of wildlife habitat;
4. Signing along Highway 58 during prescribed burning when smoke may reduce visibility;
5. Protection of unique wildlife habitats such as rocky ridges;
6. Protection or avoidance of cultural sites;
7. Measures to reduce risk of invasive plant introduction and spread: vehicles will not be driven or parked in weed infested areas, and will be free of soil and plant parts before entering non infested/infested areas;
8. Protection of large coarse woody debris and snags except when their removal is required to maintain occupational safety;
9. Retention of at least 50% of live crown ratio of individual trees during pruning activities;

10. Protection of coral fungus (*Ramaria amyloidea*) habitat; all sizes and decay classes of woody debris will be retained in islands throughout the units. Placement of piles will be done so that the least impact to soils, surface litter, organic matter, and standing trees occurs;
11. Screens will be left between houses and between the houses and roads where possible; and
12. Attempt to notify recreation residence owners prior to prescribe burning activities.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the chief of the Forest Service in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 section 31.2 (10), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effects on the quality of the human environment.

I have concluded that this decision is appropriately categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within a category of exclusion and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in significant individual or cumulative effects on the human environment.

Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

In determining the appropriateness of using the categorical exclusion, a determination of the potential; impact to the resource conditions identified in FSH 1909.15 section 30.3(2) must be made. The following list of the potential effects to the resource conditions from the project activities.

Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated habitat or species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat

There would be **No Effect** to northern spotted owls, bald eagles, Canada lynx, or bull trout, or to the habitats associated with these species.

To avoid disturbance to the northern spotted owl, seasonal restrictions will be in place for unit six. From March 1st through September 30th no activities will take place.

To avoid disturbance to the northern bald eagle, seasonal restrictions for all units will be in place. No activities will take place in these units from January 1st through August 31st. This condition may be waived in a particular year if nesting or reproductive success of surveys reveal that bald eagles are non-nesting or that no young are present that year.

Regional Forester (R6) sensitive species: There would be **No Impact** to California wolverine, Pacific fisher, bufflehead duck, Crater Lake tightcoil snail or redband trout.

No sites for any of the plants listed on the July 2004 region 6 Forester's Sensitive Plant List that are documented or suspected to occur on the Deschutes National Forest were found during surveys in any of the proposed units.

One fungus species on the R6 Sensitive Plant List, *Ramaria amyloidea*, for which surveys are considered unfeasible, has a known site near and potential habitat with a high probability of occurrence in the units 3, 4, 5, and 6. Fuels reduction activities in the Lakeside Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project will retain all key elements for *Ramaria amyloidea* habitat event though project activities may impact individuals if those individuals occur where piles are burned. Therefore, the project **May Impact Individuals**, but will not significantly impact habitat or populations or cause loss of viability or a trend toward Federal listing.

Aquatic Resources: This project has been determined to be consistent with the Deschutes Land and Resource Management Plan as Amended by the Northwest Forest Plan Record of Decision for the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ROD, B-9) by meeting the nine objectives, as well as Key Watershed Standards and Guidelines found in the ROD, C-7. All work would be performed by hand and trees removed would be 3 inches or less in diameter.

Flood plains, wetlands, municipal watersheds, wetlands: There are no activities with in any flood plain, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and national recreation areas: The project area is approximately 2 miles east of the Deschutes River Wild and Scenic River corridor. No activities would take place adjacent to or within the river corridor.

The project is not located within a wilderness or national recreation area.

Inventoried Roadless Areas: The nearest Inventoried Roadless Area would be the Maiden Peak IRA, approximately 2 miles northeast of Odell Lake. This project would not affect roadless characteristics because activities would occur in populated areas and would not construct any temporary or permanent roads.

Research Natural Areas: There are no existing or proposed Research Natural Areas in the project area.

American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties of areas: Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision. A **no historic properties affected** determination was made.

Consultation on this finding occurred with the State Historic Preservation Office.

Best Available Science and Conclusion

My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Based on the conclusions regarding the effects to the resource conditions listed above, I have found that no extraordinary circumstances exist with the proposed project activities that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

Other Relevant Resource Conditions Considered

Invasive species are documented to occur along Highway 58 adjacent to units 3, 4, 5, and 6 and in unit 8. Clean equipment specifications would be employed for the projects that require equipment used in fuels reduction activities to be cleaned of soil and plant parts before coming on the forest and before moving from units infested with weeds to uninfested units.

Forest Service vehicles and equipment will be free of soil and plant parts when entering Forest Service lands and before and before moving from infested units to uninfested units.

Known invasive plant sites will be monitored and appropriate methods to will be used to eradicate or control the plants in those sites. Where invasive plants are known to occur in or near units, they will be controlled or eradicated prior to fuels reduction activities. In past years, weeds have been hand pulled in July or August by district personnel along Highway 58 adjacent to units 3, 4, 5, and 6.

During project activities, no equipment (including vehicles) would be allowed in invasive plant infested areas.

To prevent invasive plant germination and establishment, native vegetation will be retained in and around project activities and soil disturbance will be kept to a minimum, consistent with project activities, by minimizing heat transfer to soil during burning.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Lakeside Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project scoping letter was mailed in September of 2006. Several comments were received in response to the scoping letter, all in favor of this project.

Collaboration has occurred with individual homeowners and both homeowners associations at Crescent and Odell Lakes. In addition, the state fire protection district (Walker Range) has been a partner in the design and eventual implementation of this project.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as required by the National Forest Management Act. The plan is amended by the Northwest Forest Plan, which provides standards and guidelines for protection of watersheds and aquatic resources. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate project design features to be consistent with Intensive Recreation and Administratively Withdrawn allocations. The prescribed burning will be done in conformance with the Oregon Smoke Management System to meet smoke management objectives. Safety measures such as warning signs and or traffic control will be employed when burning and smoke affects the safety of motorists along Highway 97. Adjacent landowners will be notified when burning operations are soon to commence.

Timing of Activities

This preliminary Decision Memo is subject to a 30-day comment period. Comments and a response to comments will be incorporated into a Final Decision Memo. The Final Decision Memo will then be subject to a 45-day appeal period. Implementation can then occur dependent upon comments received and disposition of the appeal, if one is received.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to public notice, comment, and appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.5. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of a notice in *The Bulletin*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The Regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to: Christine Frisbee, Crescent Ranger District, PO Box 208, Crescent, OR, 97733. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 7:45 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone (541) 433-3200 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-crescent@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. Electronic comments must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word, rich text format, or portable document format only. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments by electronic means to ensure that their comments have been received. Individuals and

organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6.

VII. CONTACT PERSONS

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Rebecca Sakraida (Project Leader) at the Crescent Ranger District, PO Box 208, Crescent OR 97733 or via telephone at 541-433-3200.

C. CHRISTINE FRISBEE
Crescent District Ranger

Date