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DECISION MEMO FOR Hazard Tree Removal along Major Roads in the Davis Fire Area

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

Location and Decision

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PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS

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We welcome your comments on our service and your suggestions for improvement.

Forest

Deschutes National Forest

1001 SW Emkay Drive
Bend, OR 97702

(541) 383-5300

Ochoco National Forest

3160 N.E. 3rd Street
Prineville, OR 97754

(541) 416-6500

Crooked River National Grassland

813 S.W. Hwy. 97
Madras, OR 97741

(541) 475-9272



I have decided to implement the Hazard Tree Removal on Main Roads within the Davis Fire Area proposed action. The project area includes selected major roads within and along the perimeter of the Davis Fire area.

Hazard tree removal will occur on the following roads: 44, 46, 4660, 4669, 4600850, 62, 6220, and 6224, and is generally limited to the high and moderate intensity burn area. Refer to the attached map ([below](#)) for a display of the road locations. Trees would be removed along portions of approximately 12 miles of road.

Hazard trees are defined as all dead trees over 6 inches diameter (at 12 inches above the ground) tall enough to reach the roadbed and leaning toward the road. Other unstable trees, dead or alive, that are identified, will be assessed for risk and failure potential using techniques from the Long-Range Planning for Developed Sites guide to determine whether they should be felled. The Deschutes National Forest Hazard Tree Management Handbook, the Long-Range Planning for Developed Sites in the Pacific Northwest (FPM-TP039-92), EM-7720-100 engineering construction specifications, and the 2400-6 (T) Timber Sale Contract, were used to develop the hazard tree standard for this project.

The scoping notice stated that most hazard trees would be within 100 feet of the roadside. That is true, but where hazard trees are tall enough, or the slope is steep enough for hazard trees to reach the road from farther than 100 feet, they will also be removed. Some of the hazard trees may be sold as commercial timber and they will only be hauled from existing roads. No new road construction will take place.

The following conditions will apply during implementation:

- Implementation is expected to take place in November, but if not completed in that time, the following mitigation will be required: Harvest activities would be restricted from within ¼ mile of known bald eagle nests between January 1 and August 31. This condition may be waived in a particular year if nesting or reproductive success surveys reveal that bald eagles are non-nesting or that no young are present that year.
- Because the fire may have displaced eagles from known nest sites, the restriction will also apply to any new nest locations found during nesting surveys completed in January 2004.
- All trees felled within a riparian reserve on any stream body will be directionally felled into the channel and left in place.
- On Road 4669, any removal of the hazard trees will require full suspension of both ends.
- Recommended noxious weed prevention measures included in Appendix A will be followed during project implementation.

Purpose

In late June and early July, a wildfire burned over 21,000 acres of National Forest Land on the Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest. High levels of mortality can be found along the roads within the high and moderate intensity fire areas.

Some hazard trees were felled during suppression efforts, however, a significant number of dead trees remains along these roads including open perimeter roads and Road 46 (Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway). These trees meet the hazard tree definition of being tall enough to reach the roadbed and leaning toward the road. Public safety is a concern along these roads where dead trees could fall onto travelers.

There is a need to provide safe access to National Forest System Lands within the Davis Fire perimeter. The purpose of the project is to protect public health and safety for forest visitors, workers, and local residents by felling dangerous hazard trees that have the potential to fall into the roadways. Forest Service Policy and direction (FSH 7709.58 12.2 to 12.6 and 7709.58 12.6 exhibit 1) requires providing for safety by removing hazard trees. Felling of hazard trees is a routine activity associated with road maintenance to remove hazards that pose an immediate public danger or threat along roads.

Public Involvement

The public and other agencies on the Crescent Ranger District's mailing list received copies of the proposal for comment during scoping (mailed August 1st and comments requested by August 22nd). An article describing the project appeared on August 8, 2003 in *The Bend Bulletin* newspaper.

Five organizations responded to the scoping. Concerns, questions, and suggestions for project design were brought forward by these responses. The specific considerations of this decision and the rationale described below answer those concerns and questions. Three responses indicated general support for the proposed action.

Decision Rationale and Findings

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, section 31.1b, category 4 - Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries. The felling of hazard trees is a normal and routine activity associated with road maintenance to remove hazards that pose an immediate public danger or threat along roads.

This project has received interdisciplinary review by resource specialists at the Crescent Ranger District, including botany, soils, wildlife, fish, and cultural resources. Biological Evaluations and reports are included in the project file. Based on the review of scoping comments, the project file, and support documents, it is my finding that the categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances. There will be no effect to Threatened and Endangered species or their habitats from this project. There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas, Congressionally-designated areas, or Research Natural Areas involved. Archaeological or American Indian cultural sites will not be adversely impacted. No floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds will be impacted. The mitigations included in the proposed action reduce any potential impacts to resources to very low or undetectable levels. A Weed Risk Assessment and Identification of Prevention Practices were prepared for the project; Appendix A lists actions to minimize the risk of the introduction of noxious weeds to the project area that will be followed. Riparian Reserves will be protected by leaving felled hazard trees in place in these areas.

This decision is consistent with standards and guidelines of the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan. This project also conforms to applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

My decision to fell dangerous hazard trees that have the potential to fall into the roadways will improve safety and provide for safe access to National Forest System lands within the fire perimeter. It will help to achieve the Forest Plan goal "To plan, design, operate and maintain a safe and economical transportation system providing efficient access for the movement of people and materials involved in the use and protection of National Forest lands." (Deschutes Forest Plan p 4-71).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal (36 CFR 215.12(f)) and may be implemented immediately.

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Chris Mickle, Environmental Coordinator, at PO Box 208, Crescent, Oregon, 97733, telephone (541) 433-3200.

Responsible Official:

/s/ Phil Cruz _____
PHIL CRUZ
District Ranger

____9-29-03____
Date

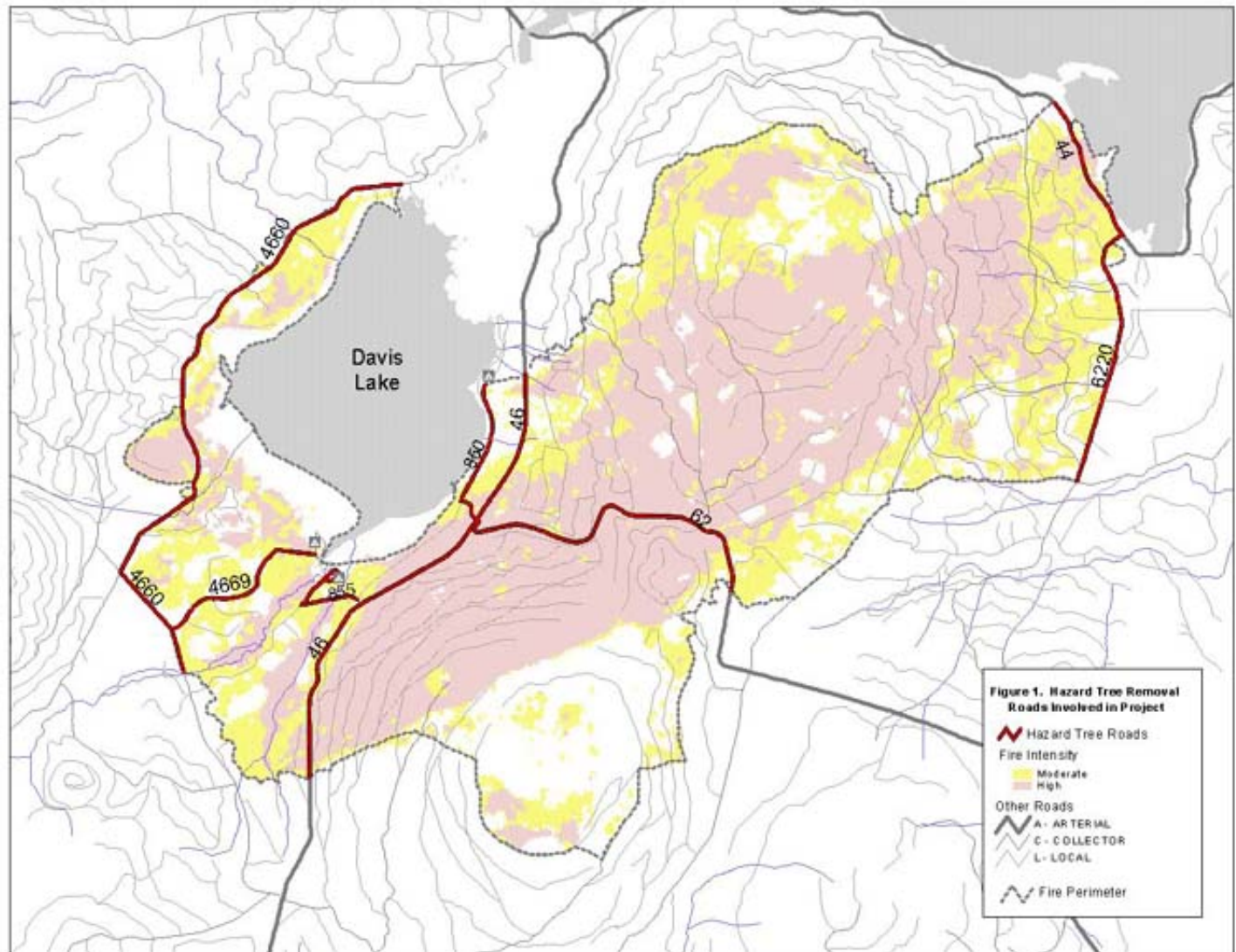
Appendix A

Noxious Weed Prevention Measures

1. Include provisions in any contracts associated with the project to ensure that all vehicles and equipment used in the project are clean and free of soil and plant parts before entering Forest Service lands.
2. Keep vehicles and equipment within the roadways when traveling to and from the project area.
3. To avoid or remove sources of weed seed and propagules to prevent the risk of spreading existing weeds, before project activities begin, inventory and prioritize weed infestations for treatment in project operating areas and along access routes. Control weeds as necessary. Also, restrict project operations to periods when spread of seed or propagules are least likely

(when fruits and seeds are not present).

4. To reduce the risk of spreading weed infestations, begin project operations in uninfested areas before operating in weed-infested areas (Roads 4669, 6220, and 6224).
5. When operating in weed-infested areas, clean equipment before leaving the infested area (Roads 44, 46, 62, 4660, and 4600850). Sites where equipment can be cleaned will be identified.
6. Deschutes National Forest vehicles or machinery involved in the project will not park in or unnecessarily drive through weed-infested areas.
7. Undercarriages of DNF vehicles or machinery potentially contaminated with noxious weed fruits, seeds, or other propagules will be thoroughly cleaned before traveling to the project areas.
8. Inspect the weed-free roads in the project area starting in the growing season after the project is completed. If weeds are found, apply appropriate treatments and continue to inspect and treat during each growing season thereafter until the weeds are eradicated.
9. Continue to treat weeds in documented sites as appropriate according to current direction.



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Last Modified: Thursday, 24 June 2004 at 14:26:29 EDT