

Deschutes & Ochoco National Forests Crooked River National Grassland

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Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact Crescent Lake Wildland-Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project

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

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SCHEDULE OF PROJECTS

PROJECT INFORMATION

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- Deschutes SO
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♦ Forest Health, Fire, Fuels, Vegetation Management

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PLANS, ANALYSES, ASSESSMENTS

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background and Location

The Crescent Lake Wildland-Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project Area is located on the Crescent Ranger District of the Deschutes national Forest, Klamath County, Oregon. The legal description of the project area is as follows:

T 23 S, R 6 E, Sections 24, 25, 26, 35
T 23 S, R 7 E, Section 31
T 24 S, R 6 E, Sections 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36
T 24 S, R 7 E, Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 19, 20, 21, 29, 30, 31

This project was proposed in the spring of 2002 with the purpose of reducing hazardous fuels levels, improving the growth and vigor of trees, and improving emergency access within the wildland-urban interface around the community of Crescent Lake Junction and recreational developments on the Crescent Ranger District. The purpose and need is based on information contained in the Odell and Big Marsh Watershed Analyses, the Davis Late Successional Reserve Assessment, and the Crescent Lake Roads Analysis. The Environmental Assessment documents the analysis of three action alternatives to meet this need.

Decision and Rationale

Deschutes National Forest1001 SW Emkay Drive
Bend, OR 97702

(541) 383-5300

Ochoco National Forest3160 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



Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement **Alternative 3** with the modifications described below. Alternative 3 modified will achieve project goals by treating approximately 3,700 acres of the project area. The selected alternative reduces fire hazard by thinning and treating slash by hand or machine piling on about 3,400 acres; pruning and mowing are prescribed over approximately 208 acres; 169 acres of meadow will be enhanced by thinning out encroaching lodgepole pine and prescribed burning (refer to the attachment for a list of units). The selected alternative will also reconstruct approximately 2 miles of an existing system road thus reducing sedimentation and improving access for administrative and fire-fighting purposes, as identified by a roads analysis. Improvement of an existing spur road (approximately 200 feet) off of Forest Road 4682 will provide secondary egress from the north end of Diamond View estates. This alternative will meet the purpose and need by reducing fuels in National Forest lands adjacent to recreation sites, residential areas, and the business area of Crescent Lake Junction.

This alternative is responsive to the issue of northern spotted owl habitat by avoiding treatments within nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat in some units in the project area. Thinning in non-NRF stands will provide protection where they surround NRF habitat. To make Alternative 3 modified more responsive to the northern spotted owl habitat issue, I am authorizing only small-tree thinning in units 22, 58, 32, and 34. To be more responsive to the forest health objectives of enhanced growth and vigor of overstory trees and reducing competition and stress, I am authorizing larger tree thinning (greater than 8" dbh) as identified for Alternative 3 in the EA. By lowering stand density the thinning of larger trees (greater than 8" dbh) will also provide a longer duration of benefits because it will take longer for stocking levels to reach a high risk for fire, insects, and disease. I believe this modified alternative creates an appropriate balance of retaining forest structure important for the northern spotted owl while protecting the other important values in and around the community of Crescent Lake Junction.

All units within the project are within 1 mile and most units are within ½ mile of private property or a recreational development. Because the project area has a fire occurrence rate twice that of the Deschutes National Forest average, which can be attributed to the high amount of intermix between human development and forest land, I believe focusing our efforts here will be effectual. Overall, Alternative 3 modified provides increased fire protection for forestlands, recreation sites, and private property by reducing the risk of large, high intensity wildfires, as well as improved forest health. I feel that implementing this project is also important for protecting the forests surrounding the area. To the west of the project area is the Diamond Peak Wilderness, to the south is the Oregon Cascades Recreation Area, and to the north and east is the Davis Late Successional Reserve. We will improve our ability to suppress wildfire before it spreads to these areas that provide substantial recreation, scenery, and wildlife habitat values.

By reconstructing Forest Road 6020100, we will be able to access a portion of the project area that is important to treat because of the location between private property and the railroad. Additionally, work on the 6020100 road will improve conditions for the watershed by eliminating sedimentation that could reach Crescent Creek and its tributaries. The third benefit of fixing this road is access for firefighting purposes in the event of a wildfire.

Mitigation measures are included in order to ensure consistency with the Forest Plan. All of the mitigation measures listed in the EA on pages 21 to 30 are a part of this decision. These measures will protect soils, streams, and riparian areas, maintain desired habitat conditions, lower the incidence of noxious weeds, and protect cultural resources and scenic views.

Based on the analysis contained in the Environmental Assessment, I had sufficient information to make a reasoned choice between the alternatives and no significant impacts on the quality of the human environment have been identified. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 12 to 20.

Alternative 1 - Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No actions would be taken to reduce the amount of fuels or improve tree growth in the project area. No improvement on road 6020100 would take place. I did not select the No Action alternative because it does nothing to address the purpose and need for reducing fuels and improved emergency access to the area. The risk of wildfire and the threat to life and property can best be addressed with the action alternative selected.

Alternative 2 - Alternative 2 included 3,450 acres of treatment through thinning and slash piling. The difference between this alternative and the selected alternative is fewer acres that would be thinned commercially (i.e. trees > 8" dbh). I felt that a better mix of stands treated to a lower density could be found with the modifications made to Alternative 3. In particular, reducing the stand density in units adjacent to State Hwy 58, around the Crescent Lake townsite, and adjacent to private property on Royce Mountain would provide a longer-term benefit.

Alternative 4 - This alternative was developed in response to the issue of northern spotted owl habitat. It eliminated treatment on 90 acres of spotted owl nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat compared to Alternative 2 and reduced treatment on some 110 acres to small tree thinning only. This alternative was not selected because it did not do enough to lower the stand density in units adjacent to the highway and private property. It also would not provide as much benefit to the health of forest stands surrounding Camp Makualla. It would not provide as much protection through lowered fire hazard.

Public Involvement

The project was listed in the Schedule of Projects in the spring of 2002. The proposal, in general terms was mailed to interested parties of the public and other agencies for comment during scoping on June 26, 2002. Later in November 2002 another letter was sent that included a more detailed description of the proposed activities and treatment unit locations.

Using the comments from the public, the interdisciplinary team identified issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. Main issues of concern included the expected effects to northern spotted owl habitat and the amount of difference in silvicultural condition and fire behavior expected when more basal area is removed (see EA pages 3 and 4). To address these concerns, the Forest Service created the alternatives described above.

In April 2004 the Environmental Assessment was mailed to the District's list of interested and affected parties for review and comment. Three comments were received. One expressed general support for this type of project and showed a preference for aggressive treatment of fuels and forest health problems.

Another commenter raised concerns regarding the protection of various management allocations and soils and focusing fuels reduction near homes and communities. The third commenter related extensive concerns over fish, wildlife, large trees, soils, sedimentation, noxious weeds, riparian areas, and management allocations. These comments were considered and responded to (Appendix E of the EA). In response to some comments, clarifications were added to the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these 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. This determination is based on the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the Environmental Assessment and supporting documents (e.g. biological assessment), which describe direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of this decision. I have found that the context of the environmental impacts of this decision is limited to the local area and is not significant. I have also determined the severity of these impacts is not significant, based on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. The beneficial and adverse impacts are disclosed in the EA and no significant effects on the human environment have been identified (EA pages 31-98).
2. There have been no significant adverse effects on public health and safety identified. Prescribed burning will affect air quality for a short period in the immediate vicinity of the activity (EA page 93). Implementation of Alternative 3 modified will benefit the public's safety (EA page 42).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, such as cultural resources or wetlands because of avoidance or other measures (see EA pages 87, 95 and 97).
4. Based on the input from forest resource specialists and from members of the public, I do not expect the effects on the quality of the human environment to be highly controversial in a scientific context (EA pages 3 and 99).
5. 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. Fuels reduction and forest thinning projects are not unusual on the Forest. No significant adverse effects were identified in the environmental assessment (EA pages 31-98).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because any future management within the project area would be evaluated to determine significance; future projects would require site-specific analysis and decisions (EA pages 31-99).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant. Discussions on the cumulative effects on resources such as wildlife, botany, and soils is included in the EA. (see EA pages 31-99).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because the field surveys have been completed and all known sites will be mitigated through avoidance. A No Effect determination was made for the project. Any sites found during operations will be protected (see EA pages 29 and 95).
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 is not significant. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service occurred and a Biological Opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was received on February 17, 2004 for impacts to northern spotted owl with the conclusion that project activities would not jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl because no activities are proposed in NRF habitat within owl activity center, NRF habitat adjacent to the project area is generally in good condition. The amount of NRF habitat affected is insignificant because it is less than 1% of the available NRF on the District (EA pages 46-50). No adverse impacts to other endangered, threatened, or sensitive species will occur (EA pages 51-56).
10. The action 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 31-98).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to implement Alternative 3 modified is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages 5-6. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines for the affected Management Areas, which were developed in accordance with and conform to requirements of the National Forest Management Act.

Water quality would not be adversely affected with implementation of resource protection and mitigation measures incorporated into project design, including stream buffers and Best Management Practices. These practices are expected to be fully effective in maintaining identified beneficial uses.

The project conforms to the Clean Air Act. As stated in the EA, activities that produce emissions would be conducted under the State of Oregon Smoke Management System so that management objectives for total emissions are met. Practices that reduce the possibility of affecting Class 1 airsheds will be enforced.

This project complies with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act because it does not affect the free-flowing character of Crescent Creek and it improves conditions for vegetation within the corridor, which is an outstandingly

remarkable value of the river corridor.

Implementation Date and Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.7. A notice of appeal must be in writing and clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed in pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Appeals must be filed with the reviewing officer within 45 days of the date of legal notice of this decision in the *Bend Bulletin*, Bend, Oregon. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

File notice of appeal with:

**Regional Forester
ATTN: 1570 Appeals
333 SW First Ave.
PO Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208-3623**

Appeals can also be filed electronically at appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Electronic appeals must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf) only. E-mails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed, or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Beth Peer, Interdisciplinary Team Leader at the Crescent Ranger Station, PO Box 208, Crescent, Oregon 97733 (phone 541-433-3200).

PHIL CRUZ
District Ranger
Crescent Ranger District

_____7-14-04_____
Date

Figure 1. Project Area and Unit Locations

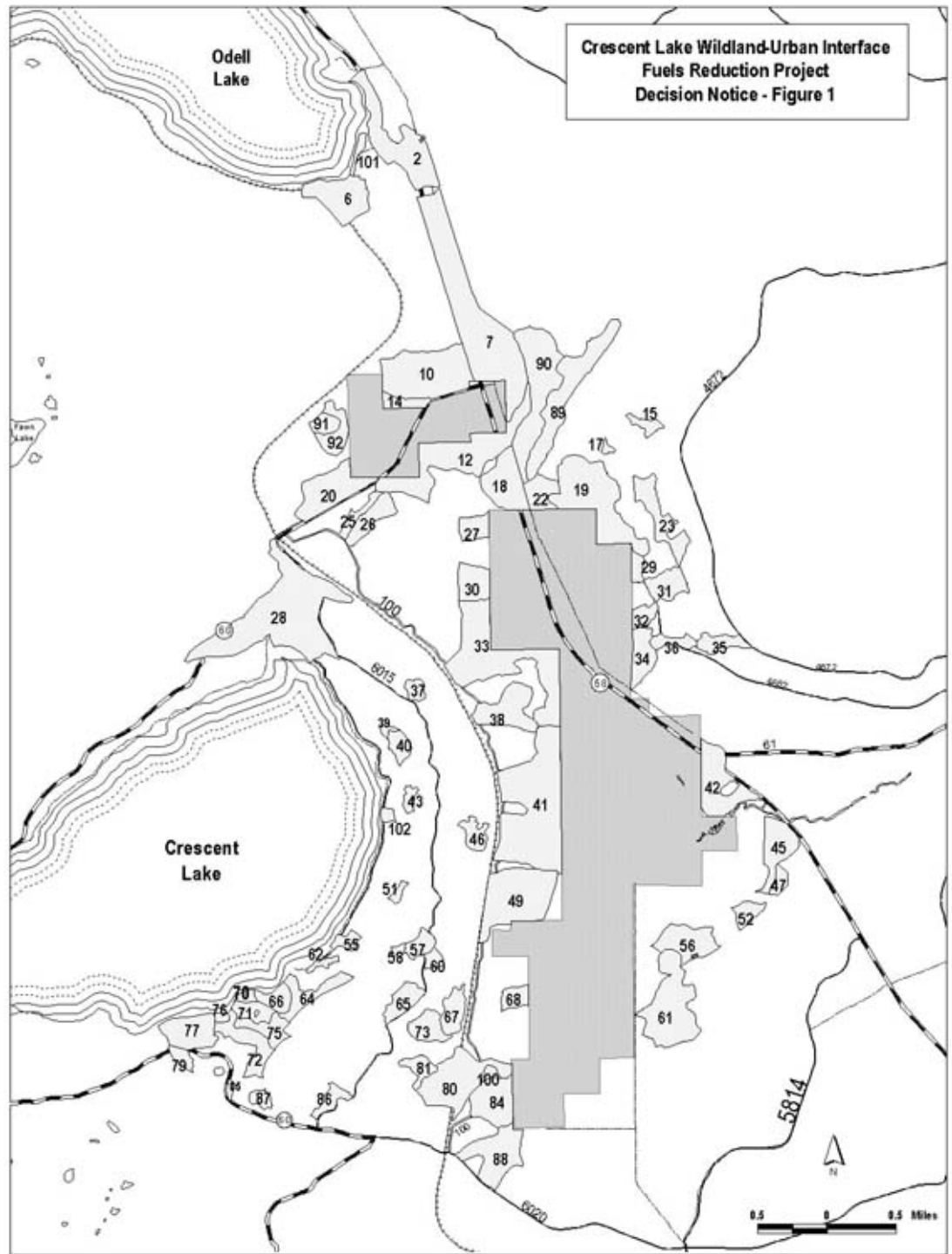


Table 1. Units and Treatments Authorized with this Decision

Definitions:

Unit - the number identifying the treatment unit in the EA Prescription

HTH - thinning >8" dbh

PCT - small tree thinning, < 8" dbh

PILE - Hand or machine piling of slash, piles burned

Management Area

GFO - General Forest
 WSR - Wild and Scenic River
 OGR - Old Growth
 BEMA - Bald Eagle
 INR - Intensive Recreation
 SV - Scenic Views
 OCRA - Oregon Cascades Recreation Area
 LSR - Late Successional Reserve
 MAT - Matrix

Unit	Acres (Gross)	Prescription	Forest Plan Management Area	Northwest Forest Plan Allocation	Comments
2	102	HTH/HSV, PCT, HAND PILE, UNDERBURN NORTH	INR/OGR	LSR	NRF Specifications for PCT
6	68.1	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	LSR/AWD	
7	238.8	HTH/HSV, PCT, PILE	INR/OGR	LSR/AWD	
10	128.4	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
12	139	HTH/HSV, PCT, PILE	INR/SV/WS	AWD/MAT/CWD	
14	16.6	PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
15	11.6	PCT, MOW, PILE	GFO/SV	MAT	
17	3.6	PCT, MOW, HAND PILE	GFO	MAT/CWD	
18	62.8	HTH, PCT, PILE	SV/WS	MAT/CWD	
19	138.4	PCT, MOW, PILE	GFO/SV	MAT	
20	72.9	HTH, PCT, HAND PILE	INR/WS	AWD/CWD	
22	29.9	HTH, PCT, HAND PILE	SV	MAT	No HTH in NRF; NRF Specifications for PCT
23	52.7	PCT, HAND PILE	SV	MAT	
25	15.2	PCT, HAND PILE	WS	CWD	
26	33.4	HTH, PCT, PILE	WS	CWD	
27	22.4	PCT, PILE	WS	CWD	
28	245.2	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/INR/WS	MAT/AWD/CWD	
29	10.9	PCT, MOW/PRUNE, PILE	GFO	MAT	
30	35.5	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/WS	MAT/CWD	
31	32.3	PCT, PRUNE, HAND PILE	GFO/SV	MAT	
32	14.5	PCT, HAND PILE	GFO/SV	MAT	NRF Specifications for PCT
33	170.5	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/SV	MAT/CWD	
34	35.9	PCT, PILE	GVO/SV	MAT	NRF Specifications for PCT
35	21.8	PCT, PILE	SV	MAT	
36	15.5	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/SV	MAT	
37	11.7	PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
38	61.2	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
39	3.9	HTH, PCT, PILE	EAG/GFO/INR	MAT/AWD	
40	17.8	PCT, PILE	EAG	MAT	
41	231	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/WS	MAT/CWD	
42	73.9	HTH, PCT, PILE	OGR/SV/WS	AWD/CWD/MAT	
43	8.6	PCT, PILE	EAG/INR	MAT/AWD	
45	49.5	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/WS	MAT/CWD	
46	20.3	PCT, PILE	EAG/GFO	MAT	
47	11.5	PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
49	121.3	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
51	5.8	PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
52	17.2	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
55	11.7	HTH, PCT, PILE	EAG/INR	AWD	

56	53.1	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/WS	MAT/CWD	
57	18.4	PCT, PILE	EAG/GFO	MAT	
58	4.3	PCT, PILE	EAG	MAT	NRF Specifications for PCT
60	9.6	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
61	113.9	PCT, PILE	GFO/WS	MAT/CWD	
62	6.7	HTH, PCT, HAND PILE	INR	AWD	
64	35.9	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
66	22.1	HTH, PCT, HAND PILE	INR	MAT	
67	28.8	PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
68	18.1	PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
70	6.6	HSL, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
71	21.4	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
72	44.4	HTH, PCT, PILE	EAG/INR	MAT/AWD	
73		PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
75	28.3	HTH, PCT, PILE	EAG/INR	MAT/AWD	
76	4.3	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
77	52.5	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
79	11.8	HTH, PCT, PILE	EAG/INR/OCR	MAT/AWD/CWD	
80	96.3	MEADOW TREATMENT	GFO	MAT	
81	18.8	PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
84	58.2	PCT, PILE	GFO	CWD/MAT	
85	14	HTH, PCT, PILE	EAG	MAT	
86	17.7	PCT, HAND PILE	GFO	MAT	
87	10.7	PRUNE, HAND PILE	EAG/GFO	MAT	
88	72.6	MEADOW TREATMENT	GFO/WS	MAT/CWD	
89	103.2	PILE	GFO/INR/SV	MAT/AWD/MAT	
90	121.8	HTH, PCT, PILE	GFO/INR/OGR	AWD/MAT	
91	15.7	PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
92	29.7	HTH, PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	
100	5.9	PCT, PILE	GFO	MAT	
101	7.6	HTH, PCT, HAND PILE	INR	LSR	
102	5.9	PCT, PILE	INR	AWD	

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