

# **DECISION MEMO**

## **2006 SMALL TREE THINNING**

USDA FOREST SERVICE  
Deschutes National Forest  
Crescent Ranger District  
Klamath County, Oregon

I have decided to authorize small-tree thinning on approximately 151 acres in 7 units (maps attached). Over-crowding has resulted in reduced growth and vigor due to competition for scarce resources. This project is needed to increase the potential for adjacent trees to develop into stands that serve future social and biological needs. It is being planned under the direction of the 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and its associated amendments.

Thinning will be performed by hand with chain or brush saws. Trees to be thinned are generally 15-20 years old and not larger than 7 inches in diameter. Spacing on leave trees will vary between 18 and 20 feet, depending on the objectives for the specific stand. Wildlife habitat improvement and future big game cover are considerations that were incorporated into the design of the project.

Slash from the thinning will be hand piled in many stands that are near main roads or the urban interface or utilized as special forest products, such as poles. Whatever cannot be chipped or utilized will then be burned. Typically, emissions that result are very low due to low fire intensities and the small volume of material to burn. All burning will comply with the Oregon smoke management guidelines and will be performed with an approved burning plan.

### **Location**

The project area is located primarily on or near Highway 58 and County Road 61 (Crescent Cut-off) on the Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest. It is located within the boundaries of the Northwest Forest Plan. Legal location descriptions are as follows:

T. 24 S., R. 7 E., Sections 3, 16, 21, 27, 28 34;

T. 23 S., R. 8 E., Section 35; Willamette Meridian, Klamath County

### **Public Involvement**

On August 12, 2005, a letter announcing the proposed project was sent to 92 interested people and organizations requesting their comments on the project. Two responses were received. The Ochoco Lumber Company voiced support for the project. Also, the Oregon Natural Resources Council expressed support and preferred that the Forest Service introduce variability within the stands. Thinning prescriptions have been designed to include spacing that achieves stand variance.

### **Reason for Categorical Exclusion and Findings**

Based on the analysis and previous experience with this type of project, and considering the project design and conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances<sup>1</sup> are associated with the small tree thinning and slash cleanup activities proposed in this project. This finding is based on the surveys, mitigation measures, and monitoring requirements designed into this activity. I

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<sup>1</sup> Extraordinary Circumstances, as clarified by final interim directive August 2002.

find that this project falls within a category established in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2 (6)) that does not individually or cumulatively have significant effects on the human environment. Therefore, this project is categorically excluded from preparation of an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment.

There will be no effect to Threatened and Endangered species or their habitats; there are no Inventoried Roadless Areas or Research Natural Areas involved; archaeological or American Indian cultural sites, floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds will not be negatively affected.

This project is consistent with direction found in the Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan. Biological Evaluations were prepared for Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered animal and plant species and are located in the project file at the Crescent Ranger District. Also, the project meets all of the applicable Project Design Criteria from the Programmatic Biological Assessment for central Oregon.

### **Implementation Date/Conditions Related to Implementation**

This project is scheduled for implementation starting in spring 2006 and to be completed over the next 5 years. **The following conditions are incorporated into the decision to be consistent with the 1990 Deschutes National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan:**

#### **Wildlife**

1. To prevent harassment of calving elk and/or fawning deer, and to prevent disturbance of or injury to young of the year, treatment units within 0.25 mile of riparian areas should be completed outside of calving/fawning season of May 1 through June 30. The following units are affected: Ledo 58 unit 5.
2. Activities should not take place within 0.25 mile of an active raptor nest within the reproductive season for that species. If active raptor nests and/or great blue heron rookeries are discovered within 0.25 mile of planting units, treatments within the affected areas would be deferred until the end of the applicable reproductive season. This condition may be waived in a particular year if nesting or reproductive success surveys reveal that the raptors are non- nesting or that no young are present that year. The waiver is good for that nesting season only.
3. A contract provision to protect Proposed, Endangered and Threatened wildlife species and/or proposed or designated Critical Habitat would be required in the event of the discovery of a listed species in the project area. A wildlife biologist would review new information and evaluated the need for seasonal restrictions and/or consultation requirements if needed.
4. If an active great gray owl nest is located within 0.25 mile of the project activity with the potential for disturbance, a limited operating period would be placed on all activities through August 31 of the year the nest(s) are active.
5. Prescribed fire managers will use smoke management forecasts in order to minimize smoke entering into suitable eagle or owl habitat or Class 1 airsheds, and ensure adequate dissipation.
6. A 50' buffer on all seeps and springs except in Ledo 58 unit 5. Thinning may occur in the riparian area of Ledo 58 unit 5, leaving all pacific yew if present. All piles must be 50' outside of the wet areas.
7. In thinning units, downed logs with a large end diameter of 10 inches and greater are not to be cut and piled. They may be moved to breakup the continuity of fuels. Where down wood is limited (potentially in C&R 18), leave two piles/acre unburned. If possible, create wildlife piles would be created.

8. A sensitive resource has been located within the project area and will be buffered and avoided during implementation.

## **Noxious Weeds**

9. Include provisions in contracts that require equipment used in precommercial thinning, mowing, and grapple or hand piling activities to be cleaned of soil and plant parts before coming on the forest.
10. Forest Service vehicles and equipment will be free of soil and plant parts when entering Forest Service lands and before moving from infested units to uninfested units.
11. Monitor known weed sites and use appropriate methods to eradicate or control the weeds in those sites.
12. Schedule units with weeds for thinning and mowing after uninfested units have been completed and insure that equipment and personnel are free of soil and plant parts before moving from infested units to uninfested units.
13. Workers should inspect, remove, and properly dispose of weed seed and plant parts found on their clothing and equipment. Proper disposal means bagging the seeds and plant parts and disposing of them in a way that insures that seeds and propagules cannot spread. The best disposal method is to burn them in an incinerator.

## **Water and Soil Quality**

14. Motorized access into units for special forest products are not allowed off existing roads unless approved by the coordinator or district hydrologist. Upon completion, approved temporary roads or trails resulting from removal of material shall be effectively closed and impassable.

## **Consistency with Late Successional Reserve Standards and Guidelines**

C&R Unit #18 is a managed plantation and is located within the LSR. The Regional Ecosystem Office has exempted small diameter thinning from review<sup>2</sup> because the project was designed to meet the following criteria:

1. Young stands are overstocked to a point where achieving Late Successional objectives will be considerably delayed.
2. Trees to be cut are 6" in diameter or below.
3. Tracked, tired, or similar ground-based skidders or harvesters will not be used.
4. Silvicultural prescriptions are designed to achieve species diversity and varied spacing.
5. Cutting is by hand and chainsaws.

## **Administrative Review**

The 30 day notice and comment period ended on December 16, 2005. This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any written notice of appeal of the decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, "Appeal Content." The notice of appeal must be filed hard copy with the Regional Forester, ATTN: 1570 APPEALS, 333 S.W. First Avenue, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3623, faxed to (503) 808-2255, sent electronically to [appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us), or hand delivered to the above address between 7:45AM and 4:30PM, Monday through Friday except legal holidays. The appeal must be postmarked or delivered within 45 days of the date the legal notice for this decision appears in The Bulletin. The publication date of the legal notice in The Bulletin is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal and those wishing to appeal should not rely on dates or

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> Memorandum dated April 20, 1995

