

Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Baja 58 Project (Fiscal Year 2000 Portion)

Crescent Ranger District, Deschutes National Forest Klamath County, OR

Location

The Baja 58 project area is located approximately 50 miles south of Bend, Oregon, encompassing the southern third of the District. (T23S, T24S, T25S, T26S, R5 1/2E, R6E, R6 1/2E, R7E, R8E, R9E. Refer to the attached decision notice Map DN-1 for vicinity of the project area and Map DN-2 for project area boundaries and local reference points.

The project area includes 175,750 acres, of which 151,100 acres are national forest system lands. The project area contains six subwatersheds: Walker Ridge, Upper Little Deschutes, Hemlock, Big Marsh, Middle Little Deschutes, and Crescent Lake.

Decision

In September 1998, a decision was made to proceed with Alternative 3 as modified by the decision notice. As discussed in that decision notice, not all of the vegetation management activities included in Alternative 3 were made part of that decision because of the need to complete necessary sensitive plant survey work.

Meanwhile, additional survey requirements have been established within the range of the northern spotted owl. These requirements are currently under review, with a decision expected some time in the Summer of 2000. Because of the uncertainty of these requirements, I will limit this decision to that portion of Alternative 3 that lies outside of the range of the northern spotted owl. This portion of Alternative 3 is not subject to those survey requirements.

For the portions of the project outside the range of the northern spotted owl, the necessary surveys have been completed, with the information added to the project record. Based on the analysis documented in the environmental assessment (EA) and supplemented by the survey result, I have decided to implement the remaining portions of the modified Alternative 3 outside the range of the northern spotted owl. This decision comprises the following actions:

- Understory thin approximately 2,762 acres. Approximately 104 acres of this are in small tree thinning areas (PCT/or Post-Pole sales), with the remaining 2,658 acres in larger sized commercial timber sale opportunities.
- Prescribe burn fire-tolerant stands to reduce density and/or move stands toward a single story structure. This decision includes approximately 904 acres of this treatment.
- Salvage 126 acres.
- An additional 40 acres of salvage have been included in this decision that were not included in the EA in 1998. The added area lies between two other salvage units that were included in the 1998 decision. This unit lies approximately 1.5 miles southwest of the Two Rivers North subdivision (T. 25S, R.7E, sections 10 and 11). Because this area was not included in the original alternatives, no opportunity to comment had been provided, but a comment period occurred separately in 1999. The only comment received came in support of this addition.
- Construct/reconstruct 0.8 miles of road (low standard, temporary road
- Harvest total green volume of approximately 5.4 million board feet (MMBF) and 0.3 MMBF of salvage (estimated total volume is 5.7 MMBF).

This decision does not change other decisions made in September 1998 regarding vegetation treatments, road closures, riparian reserve boundaries and other actions.

Rationale

I have chosen to include these treatments with the portions of Alternative 3 selected in September 1998 in order to meet the intent and objectives for that alternative. If the additional areas included as part of this decision were not implemented, some benefits would still be realized, but the strategic significance of Alternative 3 would be diminished.

Alternative 3 as a whole treats more high-risk stands than Alternative 2, responding more completely to the need to reduce fuel loads and reduce stand densities. Similarly Alternative 3 moves the project area towards forest conditions that are more resistant to insect and disease, and stand-replacement fires, which will in turn take a larger step toward creating a more resilient landscape. This more resilient landscape provides long-term, stable habitat for a range of wildlife species.

I believe that treatments proposed provide a substantial benefit to wildlife, yet I am also aware that one of the main issues that arose during the analysis focused on cumulative adverse impacts to wildlife habitat, impacts that are associated with Alternative 3 in particular. However, after modification, Alternative 3 avoids the areas of greatest concern to wildlife habitat. In this way the selected alternative can begin the process of reducing risk of large-scale habitat loss, while it also avoids areas currently needed to provide wildlife habitat for specific species (e.g. northern spotted owls) or for a variety of species that could be adversely impacted by cumulative impacts of this project when considered with other projects.

During the public comment period, concerns were raised regarding impacts of Alternative 3 to project area resources. Concerns were also raised that Alternative 3 did not go far enough fast enough to provide the risk reduction that we seek. I have considered both the benefits and the impacts of the selected alternative and believe that it finds the needed balance. I believe that the selected alternative focuses on those areas most in need of

treatment that will reduce risk, thus resulting in long term important benefits to these resources. By reducing the amount of treatment in certain locations (especially in the southern part of the project area in the Walker Rim area), I believe the greatest benefit will occur, while reducing potential impacts.

Alternatives Considered

The environmental assessment describes three alternatives in detail: Alternative 1 (No Action) proposes no management activities. Alternative 2 would implement various vegetation treatments on approximately 11,631 acres to reduce the risk of insect, disease, and wildfire damage by treating as much of the high risk stands as possible while keeping the rate of change at a low to moderate level. Alternative 3 would implement similar vegetation treatments as Alternative 2, but over more area (15,245 acres), with the emphasis being to move the forest towards sustainable conditions and to more aggressively reduce the risk of insect, disease, and wildfire. I have attached the Decision Notice from September 1998, which describes these alternatives more fully.

Public Involvement

Public involvement for this Environmental Assessment originally began with Public Scoping in the Spring of 1997. Copies of a Proposed Action and maps were mailed in November 1997 to interested individuals and groups with the intent of soliciting informational issues and concerns about the management proposals. The Proposed Action was also listed in the *Schedule of Projects for the Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests and the Prineville District of the Bureau of Land Management*. Four comments were received as a result of public scoping. No alternative-driving issues were identified as a result of these comments.

In August 1998, the project's environmental assessment was made available for public review. A public notice was published in the *Bend Bulletin* on August 12, 1998. The comment period lasted until September 11, 1998. Four comment letters were received, as well as two phone calls. Details of the comments received and specific response to the comments is found in the environmental assessment, Appendix C. Modifications to environmental assessment are also described in that appendix. No changes were made to the Environmental Assessment between September 1998 and now. Therefore no additional public involvement occurred.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have determined that implementing these additional areas of Alternative 3 (as modified) is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore 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. the biological evaluation, biological assessment and USFWS biological opinion), which describe direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of this decision. This determination is also made with consideration of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions on National Forest land and other ownership's within potentially affected areas which could have a cumulatively significant effect on the quality of the human environment.

I have found 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, considering the following factors of intensity:

1. *The analysis considered both beneficial and adverse effects.*
2. *There are no known adverse impacts to public safety. Prescribed burning will affect air quality for a short period in the immediate vicinity of the activity. Timber haul will be regulated and conform to Deschutes Road Use rules.*
3. *No unique characteristics of the geographic area such as cultural resources and wetlands will be adversely affected.*
4. *The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial.*
5. *The degree of possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain, nor are there unique or unknown risks involved.*
6. *The actions should not set a precedent for future actions which may have significant effects, nor do these actions represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.*
7. *These actions are not related to other actions that, when combined, will have significant impacts.*
8. *The field surveys for sites, objects, etc., listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places have been completed. All known sites have been mitigated by avoidance and no activity will take place which will contribute to the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. Any sites found during operation of the timber sales and related activities will be protected. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred with our finding of no effect.*
9. *As described in the Environmental Assessment, Biological Assessment, and USFWS Biological Opinion, activities will have no adverse impact to any threatened or endangered species of plant or animal. Actions to improved conditions in bald eagle habitat near Crescent Lake are expected to have a beneficial effect on bald eagles. Surveys for sensitive plants that are thought to occur in the project area have been conducted for units included in this decision. Timber harvest and other ground disturbing activities have been designed to avoid adverse impacts to known species.*
10. *None of the actions implemented by this decision threatens a violation of the Federal, State, or local law, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. (For example, effects from this action will meet or exceed state water and air quality standards.)*

Other Findings

This decision is consistent with the Forest plan as amended by the Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment No. 2 and the Inland Native Fish Strategy (1995).

This project complies with the consistency standards of 36 CFR 219.10(e). No timber will be harvested from lands not suited for timber production as defined in 36 CFR 219.14. Based on research and experience, all lands being harvested can be adequately restocked within 5 years of final harvest. All manipulation of vegetation will comply with the seven requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b).

The harvest and post-harvest vegetation management activities are consistent with the strategy of prevention in accordance with the Pacific Northwest Region's Vegetation Management EIS (1988) and the mediated agreement (1989).

Where applicable, the vegetation management treatments will be consistent with direction found in the ROD/

FEIS for managing Pacific yew.

Implementation Date

Timber sales resulting from this decision are scheduled for implementation beginning in the Spring of 2000.

Administrative Review

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any written notice of appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 214.14 and must include the reasons for the appeal. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer within 45 days of the date legal notice of this decision appears in the Bulletin (Bend Oregon). File notice of appeal with:

Regional Forester
Harv Forsgren
Attn.: 1570 Appeals
USDA Forest Service
PO Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208-3623

For information contact: Joan Suther
Acting Crescent District Ranger
P.O. Box 208
Crescent, OR 97733
Phone: (503) 433-2234

/s/ Rebecca Heath

REBECCA HEATH

Acting Forest Supervisor

February 28, 2000

Date

[Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests Website](http://www.fs.fed.us/centraloregon/manageinfo/nepa/documents/crescent/baja/bajadn2.html)

<http://www.fs.fed.us/centraloregon/manageinfo/nepa/documents/crescent/baja/bajadn2.html>

Last Update: 3/23/00

R.A. Jensen