

# **Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

## **Baja 58 Project (Fiscal Year 1998 Portion)**

**USDA Forest Service  
Deschutes National Forest  
Crescent Ranger District  
Klamath County, OR**

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### **Location**

The Baja 58 project area is located approximately 50 miles south of Bend, Oregon, encompassing the southern third of the Crescent Ranger District. (T23S, T24S, T25S, T26S, R5 1/2E, R6E, R6 1/2E, R7E, R8E, R9E). Refer to 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**

Based on the analysis documented in the environmental assessment (EA), I have decided to implement a modified Alternative 3. The modification has resulted from further review of the analysis, as well as consideration of public comment. Although I have committed in principle to implementing the entire modified Alternative 3, this decision notice applies to that portion of Alternative 3 (as modified) where plant surveys have been completed. Following additional surveys to be conducted in the coming field season, the remaining portion of Alternative 3 (as modified) would be the subject of a second decision. The portion of the modified Alternative 3 covered by this decision results in the following:

- Understory thin 5,570 acres. Approximately 150 acres lie within the Oregon Cascades Recreation Area. Of this area, most of the affected acres are incidental portions of a unit (e.g. less than 10%). Units 140, 115, and 1155 include larger proportions.

- Salvage 1,071 acres.
- Construct/reconstruct 10.2 miles of road (mostly low standard, temporary road). No road construction or reconstruction included in this decision lies within the Oregon Cascades Recreation Area.
- Harvest total green volume of approximately 10.3 million board feet (MMBF) and 2.1 MMBF of salvage. The estimated commercial timber volume for projects resulting from this decision is 12.4 MMBF.

Other actions listed as common to all alternatives would also be included in this decision (EA page 2-3). These actions include:

- Close approximately 86 miles of road
- Thin green trees to reduce shading and remove hazard trees along Hwy 58 and Hwy 97. This decision covers those units with completed plant surveys (216 acres).
- Expand riparian reserve boundaries (in particular in the vicinity of Big Marsh) to include wet soils.
- Prescribe burn fire-tolerant stands to reduce density and to move stands toward a single story structure. This decision covers units with completed plant surveys (147 acres).
- Manage vegetation in developed recreation sites around Crescent Lake to promote large tree growth and to help protect and enhance the settings and provide for public safety. This decision covers portions of campgrounds with completed plant surveys (165 acres).
- This decision also includes Unit 45 (489 acres), which includes 350 acres within the Crescent LSR, and 150 acres in the Crescent BEMA, and which includes summer residences along the northwest shore of Crescent Lake. The treatments in Unit 45 have been designed to be consistent with the recommendations found in the Big Marsh LSR Assessment, specifically sustaining and enhancing a large tree component to accommodate bald eagle in the short and long term. The treatments will move the stands near Crescent Lake toward a fire-climax type habitat to reduce the risk of large-scale habitat loss caused by wildfire. Implementation objectives aim to maintain spotted owl dispersal habitat as well.

See Map DN-3 and the attached unit list for a description of the portion of Alternative 3 (modified) implemented with this decision.

## **Rationale**

Alternative 3, as modified, was selected because it treats more high-risk stands than Alternative 2 responding more completely to the need to reduce fuel loads and reduce stand densities. Similarly this alternative 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.

As modified, Alternative 3 avoids the areas of greatest concern in terms of cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat. In this way it 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, in particular the cumulative impacts caused by a relatively fast change in habitat characteristics for certain wildlife species. Concerns were also raised with whether Alternative 3 goes far enough, fast enough to provide the risk reduction that we seek, and whether Alternatives provide for adequate utilization of salvageable

material in the project area.

I have considered both the impacts and the benefits of the selected alternative and I 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 important long-term benefits to wildlife habitat and other resources that depend upon a healthy and resilient forest. 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.

Although this decision implements only a portion of the modified Alternative 3, I would like to explain how the *entire* Alternative responds to concerns raised during the analysis and public comment period. See Map DN-4 and the attached list for a description of the entire modified Alternative 3.

The modified Alternative 3 would eventually include the following:

1. Understory thin 9,557 acres. This is 1,973 acres fewer than Alternative 3 (which proposed thinning on 11,530 acres). This eliminated thinning that is located primarily in two subwatersheds (Big Marsh and Walker Rim). As a result of this change, areas have been avoided that present the highest concern for cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat. In addition, the amount of commercial timber harvest will be reduced within the Oregon Cascades Recreation Area (OCRA), mainly by dropping Unit 30 and about half of unit 280.
2. Salvage 1,197 acres. This is about 100 acres fewer than salvage proposed in Alternative 3, primarily because this alternative avoids salvaging in units that are mainly riparian reserve.
3. Construct/reconstruct 12.1 miles of road (low standard, temporary road). This is approximately 2.75 miles less than Alternative 3. This modification eliminates road construction/reconstruction within the OCRA, as well as roads associated with other units that were dropped from Alternative 3 in order to reduce cumulative effects to wildlife habitat. (In the OCRA, a previously closed road may still be used by off road vehicles to aid in implementing the lodgepole burning, but it would be not be opened for public use and so would remain in a more undeveloped condition. The final decision on this road will occur with the second Baja 58 decision.)

## Alternatives Considered

The environmental assessment describes three alternatives in detail:

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** proposes no management activities. The forest conditions would change according to natural disturbance processes such as insect and disease outbreaks and wildfire. Vegetation trends would continue to shift from stands dominated by large pine and Douglas fir to very dense stands dominated by poles and small diameter true fir. No merchantable wood products would be utilized. This alternative was not selected because it would not meet the objectives of reducing the risk of insects, disease, or large-scale fire. Densely stocked stands and those with high loadings of natural fuels would not be treated and these areas would continue to be at risk to insects, disease, and fire.

**Alternative 2** would implement various vegetation treatments on approximately 11,631 acres. The emphasis with Alternative 2 is 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. This alternative avoids areas that are considered more sensitive to cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat, either because of recent harvests in the area, or because of the more sensitive nature of the proposed treatment areas. Also, this alternative attempts to provide a sustainable supply of timber products. The probable timber harvest is approximately 18.4 million board feet.

**Alternative 3** would implement similar vegetation treatments as Alternative 2, but over more area (15,245 acres). The emphasis of this alternative is to move the forest towards sustainable conditions and to more aggressively reduce the risk of insect, disease, and wildfire. The goal of salvage is also to utilize as much material as possible while it retains commercial value. More acres of lodgepole salvage would also be treated under this alternative. The probable timber harvest is approximately 26.7 million board feet.

## **Public Involvement**

Public involvement for this Environmental Assessment 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 information on 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. Five 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 G. Modifications to the environmental assessment are also described in that appendix.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

I have determined that implementing 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 ownerships 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 improve 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**

Within the range of the northern spotted owl, actions in the selected alternative are consistent with the management direction, standards, and guidelines in the Deschutes Forest Plan (1990) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (1994). East of the range of the northern spotted owl, 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. Other projects (salvage, road closures, highway safety thinning/salvage, etc.) are expected to be implemented starting in Spring 1999.

## **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:

Robert W. Williams  
Regional Forester/USDA Forest Service  
PO Box 3623  
Portland OR 97208  
Attention: 1570 Appeals

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

/s/ Jim Golden for                      9/30/98

SALLY COLLINS                      Date

Forest Supervisor

Department of Agriculture

Deschutes National Forest

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### [Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests Website](http://www.fs.fed.us/centraloregon/manageinfo/nepa/documents/crescent/baja/bajadn1.html)

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Last Update: 3/23/00

R.A. Jensen