

“DRAFT”

**Middle Fork Coquille 2007
Commercial Thinning and Density Management
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

South River Field Office
EA# OR-105-07-04

Date Prepared: June 22, 2007

Finding of No Significant Impact

The South River Field Office, Roseburg District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has completed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and Density Management project. Two alternatives are analyzed in detail, consisting of Alternative One - No Action and Alternative Two - The Proposed Action. Two additional alternatives were considered but not analyzed in detail for reasons discussed in the EA (pp. 14-16).

Units proposed for treatment were identified through operational inventories, stand examinations, and field verification by silviculture and wildlife staff. The proposed units are located in: Sections 5, 15, 29 and 33, T. 29 S., R. 8 W.; Sections 1, 11 and 35, T. 29 S., R. 9 W.; Sections 5, 9, 15, 27 and 33, T. 30 S., R. 8 W.; and Section 3, T. 30 S., R. 9 W., Willamette Meridian. A description of the “Proposed Action” is contained in Chapter Two of the EA (pp. 5-14).

Unaffected Resources

As addressed in the EA (p. 16), the following resources or critical elements of the human environment would not be affected under either alternative because they are absent from the project areas: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC); prime or unique farmlands; floodplains; wilderness; waste, solid or hazardous; and Wild and Scenic Rivers. No unique characteristics would be impacted (Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations - 40 CFR § 508.27(b) (3)).

Environmental Justice

The Middle Fork Coquille 2007 Commercial Thinning and density Management proposal is consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice in minority and low-income populations. As discussed in the EA (p. 17), no potential impacts to low-income or minority populations have been identified by the BLM internally or through the public involvement process. Employment associated with the project would be performed by local contractors engaged in similar types of work throughout Douglas County. Correspondence with local tribal governments did not identify any unique or special resources in the project area which provide religious, employment, subsistence, or recreation opportunities.

Cultural and Historical Resources

As discussed in the EA (p. 38), there are no known cultural resources within the project area. However, no inventories have been conducted as yet. If resources are discovered during inventory, several options would be available to address them. The first would be to avoid the resources by reconfiguring units or relocating access roads. If that option is not viable the resources would need to be evaluated to determine their significance. If the resources were found not to be significant, the project could proceed. If the resources were found to be significant, they would need to be avoided or mitigated by recovering a portion of the information that they contain. Development of a mitigation plan or treatment plan would require consultation with interested Tribal governments and the State Historic Preservation Office to determine appropriate measures to be implemented. Consequently, there would be no adverse impacts to scientific, cultural, or historical resources (40 CFR § 1508.27(b) (8)).

Wildlife

As described in the EA (pp. 24), the proposed units are overlapped by nine **northern spotted owl** home ranges. Commercial thinning and density management would modify vegetative conditions on 380 acres of unsuitable and dispersal-only habitat in these ranges (EA, p. 56). Vertical and horizontal cover would be reduced in treated areas through tree removal, with varying levels of residual tree density. Spotted owls would be expected to continue to use these stands, however, because post-project canopy cover would remain greater than 40 percent with an average tree diameter breast height of 11 inches or greater, figures widely used as a threshold for dispersal function (EA, p. 57).

It is not expected that commercial thinning and density management on the remaining acres proposed for thinning would affect any known occupied spotted owl home ranges given that more than 20 years of surveys in the South River Resource Area have not identified any other occupied sites in the project area (EA, p. 57). Post-treatment canopy closure and tree diameters in these areas would still provide functional dispersal habitat for continued use by resident single or dispersing owls.

No effect from noise disruption would be expected because any activities within the minimum disruption distances, as established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USDI, USFWS 2005a), from any known spotted owl site; would be seasonally restricted from March 1 to June 30, subject to waiver if surveys determine that owls are not present or have not successfully nested. This would ensure that noise disruption would not cause spotted owls to abandon nests or fledge prematurely (EA, p. 57).

Effects to spotted owl Critical Habitat were analyzed through consultation with the Service (USDI, USFWS 2005a). This analysis determined that habitat availability and connectivity in CHU OR-62 after the proposed density management would continue to provide for the survival and recovery of spotted owls (EA, p. 57).

As stated in the EA (p. 58), the proposed commercial thinning and density management would not be expected to directly affect **marbled murrelets** through modification of suitable habitat. Only unit 29-8-33D contains areas of suitable habitat as defined by Potential Habitat Guidelines. Ongoing surveys of this unit have not indicated murrelet occupancy but detections in adjacent stands indicate that this area is used. Consequently, it would be managed as an unmapped LSR, using guidance from the South Coast/Northern Klamath LSRA and Potential Habitat Guidelines, to protect and enhance existing suitable habitat and accelerate development of additional suitable nest trees.

No effect to murrelets from noise disruption is expected. Suitable habitat within 100 yards of Units 29-8-5A, 29-8-5B, 29-9-11A, and 29-9-11B will be surveyed for 2 years (Pacific Seabird Group 2003) to determine if the stands are occupied.

If murrelets are detected in habitat adjacent to either Unit 29-8-5A or 5B, located within the Zone 2 Restriction Corridor, seasonal operating restrictions would be implemented from April 1 to August 5, followed by Daily Operating Restrictions from August 6 to September 15.

If murrelets are detected in habitat adjacent to Units 29-9-11A or 11B, Daily Operating Restrictions would be implemented from April 1 to August 5. Where suitable habitat is present adjacent to other units would be subject to seasonal restrictions and/or Daily Operating Restrictions would be implemented as appropriate.

Effects to Critical Habitat were analyzed through consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The analysis determined that habitat availability and connectivity after the proposed density management would not affect the ability of CHU OR-O6-D to provide for the survival and recovery of the murrelet.

The proposed units currently provide marginal **northern goshawk** foraging habitat because of the high tree density and small tree diameters, factors which limit availability of goshawk prey species and goshawk maneuverability. Commercial thinning and density management would improve foraging conditions by reducing tree densities but may reduce suitability for foraging in the short term by decreasing canopy cover. In the longer term, goshawks would benefit from the accelerated growth and development of suitable nest trees and improved habitat conditions for prey species. Consequently, the proposed action would not be expected to contribute to the need to list the goshawk as a threatened or endangered species.

Townsend's big-eared bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), **Pacific pallid bats** (*Antrozous pallidus pacificus*), and **fringed myotis bats** (*Myotis thysanodes*) might also be expected in the project area where they would use large, remnant trees in the forests stands for roosting. As discussed in the EA (p. 60), these large trees would be reserved from harvest with few exceptions, but such limited removal would not be expected to result in the extirpation of these bat species, if present, from the project area. Density management in the Late-Successional Reserves and Riparian Reserves would benefit these species by accelerating the development of large trees suitable for roosting. Consequently, the proposed action would not be expected to contribute to the need to list these bat species as threatened or endangered.

Surveys would be conducted for the Bureau Sensitive **Chace sideband snail** (*Monadenia chaceana*), **green sideband snail** (*Monadenia fidelis beryllica*), **Oregon shoulderband snail** (*Helminthoglypta hertlensi*), and **spotted taildropper** (*Prophasaon vannatae pardalis*). As discussed in the EA (p. 59) if snail sites are located, they would be protected by altering unit configurations, designating buffers, enclosing the sites in unthinned areas if within the LSRs, or implementing other measures to provide suitable microclimate, undisturbed substrate, and vegetation or down wood to ensure persistence of viable populations.

Density management could decrease foraging and nesting opportunities for **hermit warblers** and **Wilson's warblers**, the effects lasting 10-15 years. It would also remove some structural complexity that provides habitat for the **winter wren**. However, maintaining “no-harvest” buffers along streams and unthinned areas dispersed throughout the units would provide refugia and continuity of use for these species. Retaining coarse woody debris, creating additional coarse wood, and fostering the development of greater structural diversity and canopy stratification would provide higher quality habitat in the long term.

Fisheries

There are no listed fish species in the project area or on the entire Roseburg District. As described in the EA (p. 31-32), the nearest occurrence of coho salmon and Essential Fish Habitat is more than two miles downstream from the nearest proposed unit. The only potential effect identified is with respect to sediment, but with implementation of the project design features and best management practices described in the EA (pp. 62-63) the risk for sediment would be localized and the risk of adverse effects to Essential Fish Habitat downstream of the proposed project area would be negligible.

Botany

The proposed commercial thinning and density management units would be surveyed for Special Status Species that might be expected in the project area (EA, p. 36 and Appendix D). No direct effects to Special Status plant species would be anticipated because, in the event that any of these species are located during surveys, sites would be protected in accordance with management recommendations designed to maintain habitat conditions favorable for persistence.

In the case of fungi, known sites of Bureau Sensitive species would not be affected by the proposed density management because of the spatial distances documented in the EA (p. 37). While it is acknowledged that commercial thinning and density management could result in the loss of unknown sites, it would not be expected that this would lead to a need to list any of these under the Endangered Species Act because suitable fungi habitat is expected to remain abundant and well-distributed.

For the reasons described above, there would be no significant adverse impacts to any special status species (40 CFR § 1508.27 (b) (9)). The anticipated impacts would be within the range and scope of those analyzed in the *Roseburg District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (PRMP/EIS).

The project is consistent with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws (40 CFR § 1508.27(b) (10)).

Implementation of the District *Integrated Weed Management Program*, in association with project design and contract provisions would minimize risk of introduction or spread of noxious weeds in association with road construction and timber harvest. Measures would be implemented to eradicate existing weed infestations. Weed establishment would be discouraged by mulching disturbed areas, seeding with native grasses, or revegetating with indigenous plants. Pressure washing or steam cleaning logging and road construction equipment prior to move-in would remove soil and other substances that could be contaminated with weed seed or other propagative materials to reduce the risk of introducing weeds from outside the project area (EA, pp. 38-39). These actions are consistent with the requirements of the Lacey Act; the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended; and Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species.

Of the ten points listed under 40 CFR § 1508.27(b), the following were considered and were found not to apply to the proposed action: significant beneficial or adverse effects; significant effects on public health or safety; effects on the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial; anticipated cumulatively significant impacts; highly uncertain or unknown risks; and no precedents for future actions with significant effects.

Based on the analysis of potential impacts contained in the environmental assessment, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and that an environmental impact statement is not required. I have determined that the proposed action is in within the scope of impacts anticipated in the PRMP/EIS, and is in conformance with the *Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (ROD/RMP) for the Roseburg District, approved by the Oregon/Washington State Director on June 2, 1995.

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Date