

**Middle South Umpqua/Dumont Creek
Commercial Thinning and Density Management
Environmental Assessment**

EA# OR105-08-08

South River Field Office, Roseburg District

“Draft” Finding of No Significant Impact

Date Prepared: October 29, 2008

Overview

The forest stands proposed for treatment are located entirely within portions of the Middle South Umpqua/Dumont Creek fifth-field watershed managed by the BLM. Individual units are located in Sections 21 and 33, T. 29 S., R. 2 W., and Sections 3, 9, 11 and 15, T. 30 S., R. 2 W., Willamette Meridian.

Two alternatives were considered and analyzed, consisting of Alternative One (No Action) described on page 4 of the EA; and Alternative Two (Proposed Action) described at pages 4-9. One other alternative, reservation of the largest trees in Riparian Reserves to provide down wood and snags, was considered but not analyzed in detail because the proposed action of thinning from below in the suppressed and intermediate canopy classes effectively accomplishes this objective (EA, p. 9).

Both context and intensity must be considered in determining significance of the environmental effects of agency action (40 CFR 1508.27):

Context

The proposed action is a site-specific commercial thinning and density management treatment on approximately 290 acres in the Middle South Umpqua/Dumont Creek fifth-field watershed. The watershed encompasses approximately 97,634 acres. As this is an intermediate treatment affecting 0.3 percent of the watershed, it does not bear any regional, statewide, national or international importance.

Intensity

The Council on Environmental Quality includes the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity.

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)

The proposed action would have a positive impact on the treated forest stands by improving tree health and vigor, enhancing commercial value of timber in the Matrix land use allocations, and accelerating development of late-successional conditions in Late-Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve land use allocations (EA, pp. 30-32).

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (2)

The proposed action is a vegetation treatment that would not affect public health or safety because it would occur in a landscape removed from residential centers and dominated by Federal and industrial forest land. Further, as found in the EA (p.51), fuel loads would be managed and there would be no substantial increase the fire risk within the area.

3. *Unique characteristics such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (3)

As addressed in the EA (p. 10), there are no Areas of Environmental Concern; prime farmlands; wetlands; wilderness; or wild and scenic rivers in proximity to the proposed commercial thinning and density management units.

As described in the EA (p. 26), cultural clearances of the nine proposed commercial thinning and density management units has been conducted. No archaeological resources were identified in Units 29-2-21A, 30-2-3A, 30-2-15A, and 30-2-15D.

Sites located in or near Units 29-2-33A, 30-2-3B and 30-2-11A were evaluated and determined not to possess significant cultural value. Sites located in or near Units 30-2-9C and 30-2-15C have not been evaluated, but would not be affected by the proposed commercial thinning and density management, because the first site would be buffered and the second site is not sufficiently close to unit boundaries to be affected by operations.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)

The BLM conducts thinning and density management regularly across western Oregon. There is also a wide body of literature describing the effects of such forest management activity. Effects are expected to be consisted with those of the published literature cited in the EA, and are not expected to be highly controversial.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)

This project is not unique as the BLM regularly conducts thinning and density management. When pairing professional experience with the substantial literature on the topic, there is little uncertainty regarding the effects of the proposed action. The environmental effects are fully analyzed in Chapter 4 of the EA (pp. 28-51).

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (6)

The advertisement, auction, and award of a timber sale contract allowing the harvest of trees is a well-established practice. It does not establish a precedent for future actions, nor represent any decision in principle about future considerations, as any new proposals would be subject to site-specific evaluation and analysis.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant impacts but cumulatively significant impacts.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (7)

The interdisciplinary team considered the proposed action in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. No cumulatively significant effects to resources are predicted, as discussed in Chapter 4 of the EA (pp. 28-51).

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Historic Register or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (8)

As discussed above and in the EA (p. 26), surveys for cultural and historic resources are complete and no such resources have been found warranting mitigation. As such, the proposed commercial thinning and density management would not adversely affect any of the aforementioned resources.

9. *The degree to which an 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.* - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (9)

As identified in the EA (p. 14), seven **northern spotted owl** home ranges would be affected by the proposed commercial thinning and density management to some degree.

One of the ranges, Rondeau Butte, has a known owl activity center established under the Northwest Forest Plan and managed as unmapped Late-Successional Reserve. The site was last occupied in 2003, when a pair of non-reproducing spotted owls was present; but it has been unoccupied since.

Because of relatively small tree size, high tree density, and lack of nesting structure the proposed commercial thinning and density management units are composed exclusively of dispersal-only and unsuitable habitat. Information from yearly effectiveness monitoring surveys on the location and status of spotted owls in the project area indicate that no unsurveyed suitable spotted owl habitat within approximately 0.25 miles of any proposed unit would be affected.

Thinning would reduce vertical and horizontal cover. Spotted owls would be expected to continue to use these stands, however, because post-project canopy cover would exceed 40 percent and the quadratic mean diameter of the stands would exceed 11 inches diameter breast height, figures widely used as a threshold for dispersal function (EA, pp. 34-35).

Use of thinned stands would likely be less than unthinned stands, though, until canopy cover returns to pre-treatment levels in 10-20 years. Because there is little existing suitable habitat and only sporadic occupation, thinning in proximity to the Rondeau Butte activity center would not appreciably affect the probability of spotted owl use of the site.

No effect to spotted owls from noise disruption would be expected because all activities would meet the minimum disruption distances from any known occupied spotted owl site or unsurveyed suitable habitat, as established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or be seasonally restricted from March 1st to July 15th to ensure spotted owls did not abandon nests or fledge prematurely.

As discussed in the EA (p. 23), the Federally-threatened Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus sulphureus* ssp. *kincaidii*) could be present, based upon habitat conditions and surveys conducted in comparable forest habitat elsewhere in the South River Resource Area. Habitat capable of supporting the species was surveyed with negative results.

As described in the EA (p. 18), the Federally-threatened Oregon Coast coho salmon is present in the Middle South Umpqua/Dumont Creek fifth-field watershed. Critical Habitat for coho salmon in proximity to the proposed project area includes portions of Dompier Creek, Deadman Creek and the South Umpqua River. Steep waterfalls and stream gradients limit coho salmon Critical Habitat to reaches greater than 1.5 miles downstream from the nearest unit. Essential Fish Habitat for coho salmon is coincident with critical habitat.

Direct effects to fish species from timber harvest and log hauling can result from the addition of fine sediment to streams resulting in a temporary increase in turbidity (EA p. 40). As described in the EA (p. 41), no direct effects on sediment from commercial thinning and density management would be expected. Non-compacted forest soils in the Pacific Northwest have very high infiltration capacities and are not effective in transporting sediment overland by rain splash or sheet erosion. "No-harvest" buffers of 20 ft or greater would also provide root strength sufficient to maintain bank stability, protect eroding banks and prevent additional sediment from entering streams and accumulating in gravel.

"No-harvest" buffer strips adjacent to headwater (less than 3rd order), intermittent and perennial streams would remain vegetated and non-compacted providing sufficient filtering capacity. Any sediment generated from thinning or density management activities would be intercepted by the vegetated strips soil and would not reach adjacent stream channels.

Indirect effects from road construction and renovation, timber hauling and road decommissioning could include a reduction in spawning success and egg and alevin survival where fine sediments reach streams and accumulate in gravels. The application of project design features and Best Management Practices described in the EA (p. 42) would arrest the mechanism for sediment transport or minimize the risk for delivery of fine sediment so that any effects would be expected to be short-term and so small as to not be measurable at the project level scale.

For reasons discussed in the EA (pp. 40-41), it was concluded that the proposed action was not likely to adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat for coho or chinook salmon.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.* . - 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (10)

The proposed action was designed in conformance with management direction from the ROD/RMP, which itself is in conformance with all applicable laws and regulations. Furthermore, the design features described within the EA ensure that the proposed action complies with all applicable laws (ROD/RMP p. 5).

With respect to environmental justice, the proposed action would be consistent with Executive Order 12898 which addresses Environmental Justice (EA, p. 10). No potential impacts to low-income or minority populations have been identified by the BLM internally or through public involvement. Employment associated with the sales would involve local contractors who engage in similar types of work throughout Douglas County.

Correspondence with local Native American tribal governments has not identified any known unique or special resources in the project areas which provide religious, employment, subsistence or recreation opportunities (EA, p. 10).

As discussed in the EA (p. 27), implementation of the Roseburg 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. As described in the EA (p. 9), measures would include mulching disturbed areas and seeding with native grasses to discourage establishment of new weed populations and pressure washing or steam cleaning logging and road construction equipment prior to move-in to avoid introducing weeds from outside the project area. These actions would be consistent with the requirements of the Lacey Act; the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended; and Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA, I have determined that the proposed action would not have any significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

I have further determined that the proposed action conforms to management direction from 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