United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
1792(116)
MCOA
Restoration EA
A6282(WHY:jl)

DEC 20 2006

Dear Interested Public:

The *MCOA Restoration Environmental Assessment* (EA) (enclosed) is being advertised in the Medford Mail Tribune for a 30 day public review period. The review provides the public with an opportunity to comment on the Bureau of Land Managements (BLM) determination that there are no significant impacts associated with the proposed action, and an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

The proposed action would restore the site towards a forest setting by burning approximately 30 handpiles, scarifying two structure pads and the network of natural surfaced roads, seeding scarified areas and removing PacifiCorp power poles. The proposed action affects BLM lands in the Middle Applegate watershed.

We welcome your comments on the content of this document. We are particularly interested in comments that address one or more of the following: (1) new information that would affect the analysis, (2) possible improvements in the analysis; and (3) suggestions for improving or clarifying the proposed management direction. Specific comments are the most useful.

Comments, including names and addresses, will be available for public review. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name and/or address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety. This EA is published on the Medford District web site, www.or.blm.gov/Medford/, under "Planning Documents."

All comments should be made in writing and mailed to Bill Yocum, Ashland Resource Area, 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon 97504. Any questions should be directed to Bill at (541) 618-2384.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Drehobl
Field Manager
Ashland Resource Area

Enclosed (as stated)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT
ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

FOR

MCOA Restoration EA

EA No. OR-110-01-01

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA

EA COVER SHEET

Project Name/Number: MCOA Restoration EA, EA No. OR-110-01-01

Location: Ashland Resource Area

Preparer: Bill Yocum, Environmental Coordinator

Interdisciplinary Team Members

Specialist	**Title**	**Resource Value**
George Arnold	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife, T&E Animals
John Samuelson	Area Engineer	Transportation/Access
Ted Hass	Soil Scientist	Soils
Jeannine Rossa	Fish Biologist	Fisheries
Mark Mousseaux	Botanist	T&E Plant
Mark Steiger	Mycologist/Botanist	Survey and Manage Plants
Joe Hoppe	Realty Specialist	Lands
Bill Yocum	Environmental Coordinator	EA Format and Adequacy

This environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed MCOA Restoration was prepared utilizing a systematic interdisciplinary approach integrating the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts with planning and decision making.

Richard J. Drehobl
Ashland Area Field Manager

12-19-00
Date

ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA
MCOA Restoration EA

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CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Mining Claim Occupancy Act (MCOA) lease site consist of five acres site in Section 4, T.39S.,R.2W., Willamette Meridian (see attached map). The life-estate lease was to Willis and Luella Hodge who are both deceased. Heirs of the couple have completed cleanup and removal of personal property. A number of wooden structures were dismantled and the majority of the lumber was salvaged.

The former lease site has a network of natural surfaced roads, two natural surfaced structure pads, three PacifiCorp power poles, and approximately 30 handpiles of non-salvagable material. With the end of the life-lease, there is no longer any need for the above-listed site modifications. The disposal of handpiles, removal of power poles, and re-vegetation of the roads and structure pads would assist in restoring the site to a natural, forested state.

One of the Natural Surfaced Roads

Natural Surfaced Road with Handpile

PacifiCorp Power Poles

Structure Pad with Handpiles

(Automobile has been removed)

CONFORMANCE WITH EXISTING LAND USE PLANS

The proposed activities are in conformance with and tiered to the *Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP) (USDI 1995).* This Resource Management Plan incorporates the earlier *PLAN MAINTENANCE DOCUMENTATION to Delay the Effective Date for Surveying 7 "Survey and Manage" and Protection Buffer Species for the Bureau of Land Management Districts and Field Offices in Oregon and California within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl (USDI and USDA 2000). Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (USDA and USDI 1994). Draft SEIS for amendment to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigating Measures Standards and Guidelines (USDI and USDA 1999).* These documents are available at the Medford BLM office and the Medford BLM web site at <http://www.or.blm.gov/Medford/>. This EA is complements the: *Applegate Adaptive Management Area Ecosystem Health Assessment (USDA FS; USDI BLM 1994). Applegate River Watershed Assessment: Aquatic, Wildlife, and Special Plant Habitat (USDA FS; USDI BLM 1995). Middle Applegate Watershed Analysis (USDI BLM 1995). Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan EA (USDI BLM 1998). Applegate Adaptive Management Area Guide (USDA FS; USDI BLM 1998).*

RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PLANS

The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Medford District by the Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937 (O&C Act) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

This environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared to determine if the proposed action and any of the alternatives would have a significant effect on the human environment thus requiring the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) as prescribed in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. It is also being used to inform interested parties of the anticipated impacts and provide them with an opportunity to comment on the proposed activity.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE ON THIS ANALYSIS

The Ashland Resource Area Field Manager must decide:

- Whether or not the impacts of the proposed action are significant to the human environment beyond those impacts addressed in previous NEPA documents. (If the impacts are not significant, then a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be issued and a decision can be implemented. If any impacts are determined to be significant to the human environment, an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared before the manager makes a decision.)

- Whether to implement the proposed action alternative with its associated Project Design Features, or defer to the no action alternative.

RELEVANT ISSUES

During the scoping process, the Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) identified potential impacts to resources that may occur under different alternatives. Upon closer examination, the team determined which potential impacts (issues) were relevant to the analysis. These issues (listed below) become the focus of the analysis.

Survey/Managed and Endangered Species

The proposed project area may be suitable habitat for Gentner's fritillaria (*Fritillaria gentneri*), a species listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973.

Noxious Weeds

The proposed project area is a disturbed site which is a target for invasion of noxious weeds and nonnative species.

Air Quality

Burning emits pollutants directly into the air.

CHAPTER 2
Alternatives

INTRODUCTION
This chapter describes the no action, proposed action alternative, and action alternative 2.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE
Under the No Action alternative, the BLM would not restore the site towards a forest setting by removing the non-salvaged material and the network of natural surfaced roads.

PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE
This alternative would restore the site towards a forest setting by:

- Burning approximately 30 handpiles.
- Re-establish vegetation on two structure pads and the network of natural surfaced roads.
- Seed native grasses and plant conifer seedlings on the two structure pads and the network of natural surfaced roads to prevent the spread of noxious weeds.
- Remove three PacifiCorp power poles.

This proposed action alternative includes the following project design features (PDFs). PDFs are incorporated into the project design for the purpose of mitigating, reducing, or eliminating potentially adverse environmental impacts. They are directly related to the relevant issues identified in Chapter One. Chapters Three (Affected Environment) and Four (Environmental Consequences) incorporate these PDFs into the analysis of alternatives.

- Prescribed burning operations would follow all requirements of the Oregon Smoke Management Plan and the Department of Environmental Quality Air Quality and Visibility Protection Program. Burning operations would be postponed if Medford or Grants Pass are under a "yellow" or "red" wood burning advisory.

- Measures to reduce the potential level of smoke emissions from proposed burn sites would include:
  - complete burning operation as soon as practical.
  - covering hand piles to permit burning during the rainy season. Burning during the rainy season allows for better smoke dispersion because there is a stronger possibility of atmospheric mixing and/or scrubbing. Covering of piles also ensures lower fuel moisture in the fuels to facilitate their quick and complete combustion.

- Piles would be burned in a manner as to keep residual tree mortality at a minimal level.

- Scarification, to provide a seed/planting bed, would be accomplished under dry conditions. Care needs to be taken not to scarify any areas with exposed tree roots.

ACTION ALTERNATIVE 2

This alternative would restore the site towards a forest setting by:

- Chipping and scattering approximately 30 handpiles.
- Re-establish vegetation on two structure pads and the network of natural surfaced roads.
- Seed native grasses and plant conifer seedlings on the two structure pads and the network of natural surfaced roads to prevent the spread of noxious weeds.
- Remove three PacifiCorp power poles.

This action alternative 2 includes the following project design features (PDFs).

- The scattering of chips would be spread throughout the undisturbed area to a depth not to exceed 6 inches.

- Scarification, to provide a seed/planting bed, would be accomplished under dry conditions. Care needs to be taken not to scarify any areas with exposed tree roots.

CHAPTER 3
Affected Environment

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the present condition of the environment within the proposed project area that would be affected by the alternatives. Analysis incorporates the Project Design Features described in Chapter Two. This information provides a general baseline for determining the effects of the alternatives and is organized around the relevant issues identified during the scoping process. No attempt has been made to describe every detail of every resource within the proposed project area. Enough detail has been given to determine if any of the alternatives would cause significant impacts to the human environment as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The project area is in the Applegate Adaptive Management Area and is part of the Little Applegate 5th field watershed. The exact location is above Grub Gulch which is a tributary the Sterling Creek which is a tributary to the Little Applegate River. This area is upland of any riparian reserves and has a mixed conifer/hardwood forest.

SURVEY AND MANAGE/T&E SPECIES

Prefield and field examination of the site determined that it does not constitute suitable habitat for Survey and Manage Strategy 2 and Protection Buffer fungi, lichens, and bryophytes (Those currently requiring surveys prior to the implementation of ground disturbing activities.), Survey and Manage vascular plants, or the federally listed Fritillaria gentneri.

AIR QUALITY

The project area is adjacent to the Medford non-attainment area which have historically exceeded the federal health standards for carbon monoxide. The project area is less than 7 miles west of the Medford non-attainment area. The prevailing winds travel directly towards the Medford non-attainment area.

AQUATIC SYSTEMS

The project site is near two streams: Sterling Creek, and Grub Gulch, a tributary of Sterling Creek. Grub Gulch is fishless. Steelhead do spawn and rear in the lower miles of Sterling Creek, but the stream is so degraded from years of gold mining, residential development and residential access roads, that fish habitat is extremely poor, and the steelhead population is marginal. Athough technically within Critical Habitat for coho, as defined by the National Marine Fisheries Service, the nearest coho salmon spawn and rear in the Little Applegate River, approximately 4miles downstream.

CHAPTER 4
Environmental Consequences

INTRODUCTION

This chapter forms the scientific and analytic basis for comparison of alternatives. Discussions include the environmental impacts of the alternatives and any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the action alternative be implemented. Analysis incorporates the PDFs described in Chapter 2. It also identifies and analyzes mitigation measures designed to avoid or reduce projected impacts. The impact analysis addresses direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on all affected resources of the human environment.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following "critical elements" of the human environment are subject to requirements specified in statutes, regulations or executive order (for example, the Clean Water Act of 1977):

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands, Prime/Unique
- Floodplains
- Invasive, Nonnative Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Threatened & Endangered Species
- Wastes, Hazardous/Solid
- Water Quality
- Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild & Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

Only substantive site specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed in this document. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered effects to that component and found the proposed action or alternatives would have minimal or no effects.

AIR QUALITY

Effects of the Proposed Action Alternative

The effect of smoke produced from prescribed burning could reduce visibility within the project area or could concentrate the smoke around the project site or surrounding drainages. Prescribed burning could have a notable adverse effect on local and downwind air quality. Air quality of local communities could be impacted for brief periods of time due to prescribed burning.

All burning would be done in accordance with the Oregon Smoke Management Plan which tries to prevent prescribed fire smoke from being carried to or accumulating in designated smoke-sensitive areas. This project would be in conformance with federal air quality and visibility requirements to protect public health and encourage the reduction of emissions.

Effects of the Action Alternative 2

No burning is proposed with this alternative; therefore, no impacts to air quality would be expected.

No Action Alternative

No burning is proposed with the no alternative; therefore, no impacts to air quality would be expected.

WILDLIFE

Effects of the Proposed Action Alternative

Treatments such as pile burning are designed to promote forest health and are expected to benefit some wildlife species by restoring these stands toward historic habitat conditions.

Threatened/Endangered Species - Northern Spotted Owl

No large-scale change in northern spotted owl habitat function is expected due to the pile burning proposed in this alternative.

Survey and Manage Species

No large-scale change in habitat function or other detrimental effects are expected for any Survey and Manage Species due to the pile burning proposed in this alternative.

Effects of the Action Alternative 2

No large-scale change in habitat function for Northern Spotted Owl or Survey and Manage Species are expected due to pile chipping proposed in the alternative.

Effects of the No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, the piles would not be removed. Some wildlife species such as birds, rodents,

and molluscs would be attracted to the piles for nesting and cover.

D. BOTANY

Effects of the Proposed Action Alternative

Short-term and long-term effects on rare plants and their habitat would be increased with the re-vegetation of the road network and structure pads. Forested stands would move to a more healthy condition and one more closely resembling the pre-Euro-American condition because of the lack of fragmentation. Risk of browse damage would be reduced by removing small herbivore habitat (handpiles) and removing barriers to movement by large browsers.

Effects of the Action Alternative 2

Short-term and long-term effects on rare plants and their habitat would be increased with the re-vegetation of the road network and structure pads. Forested stands would move to a more healthy condition and one more closely resembling the pre-Euro-American condition because of the lack of fragmentation. Risk of browse damage would be reduced by removing small herbivore habitat (handpiles) and removing barriers to movement by large browsers.

Effects of the No Action Alternative

The piles, existing road network, and structure pads effectively reduce the area of suitable habitat for plants. Large browsers would be directed to forested areas which would increase the chance of browse damage. Also, these piles provide cover for small herbivores. Additional habitat for these animals could lead to increases in their numbers which would increase the chance of browse damage to plants.

AQUATIC SYSTEMS

The project site is very flat. It is very unlikely that chipping or burning the handpiles would contribute any sediment to Grub Gulch or Sterling Creek. There is a less than negligable chance that these actions would harm coho or coho habitat in any way. Most importantly, the proposed actions would help restore riparian vegetation and native grasses, and ensure that noxious weeds did not invade the area. These actions are all consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy of the Northwest Forest Plan.

The action alternatives are not likely to adversely affect (NLAA) coho salmon and are covered by the Letter of Concurrence from the National Marine Fisheries Service of August 11, 1997.

Effects of the Proposed Action Alternative

It is very unlikely that removing the handpiles, road network, or structure pads would contribute any

sediment to any intermittent (dry in the summer and fall) and perennial streams adjacent to the area. Due to the location of this project, Riparian Reserves on fish-bearing streams would not be affected.

Effects of the Action Alternative 2

It is very unlikely that removing the handpiles, road network, or structure pads would contribute any sediment to any intermittent (dry in the summer and fall) and perennial streams adjacent to the area. Due to the location of this project, Riparian Reserves on fish-bearing streams would not be affected.

Effects of the No Action Alternative

No change in the Riparian Reserve condition would occur. It is unlikely that restoration of the site would cause any impacts to listed fishes, their habitat, or Riparian Reserves.

CHAPTER 5
AGENCIES CONSULTED AND PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Publicity

Public notice of the availability of this EA was provided through advertisement in the Medford Mail Tribune and the BLM Medford District's central registration and recording system.

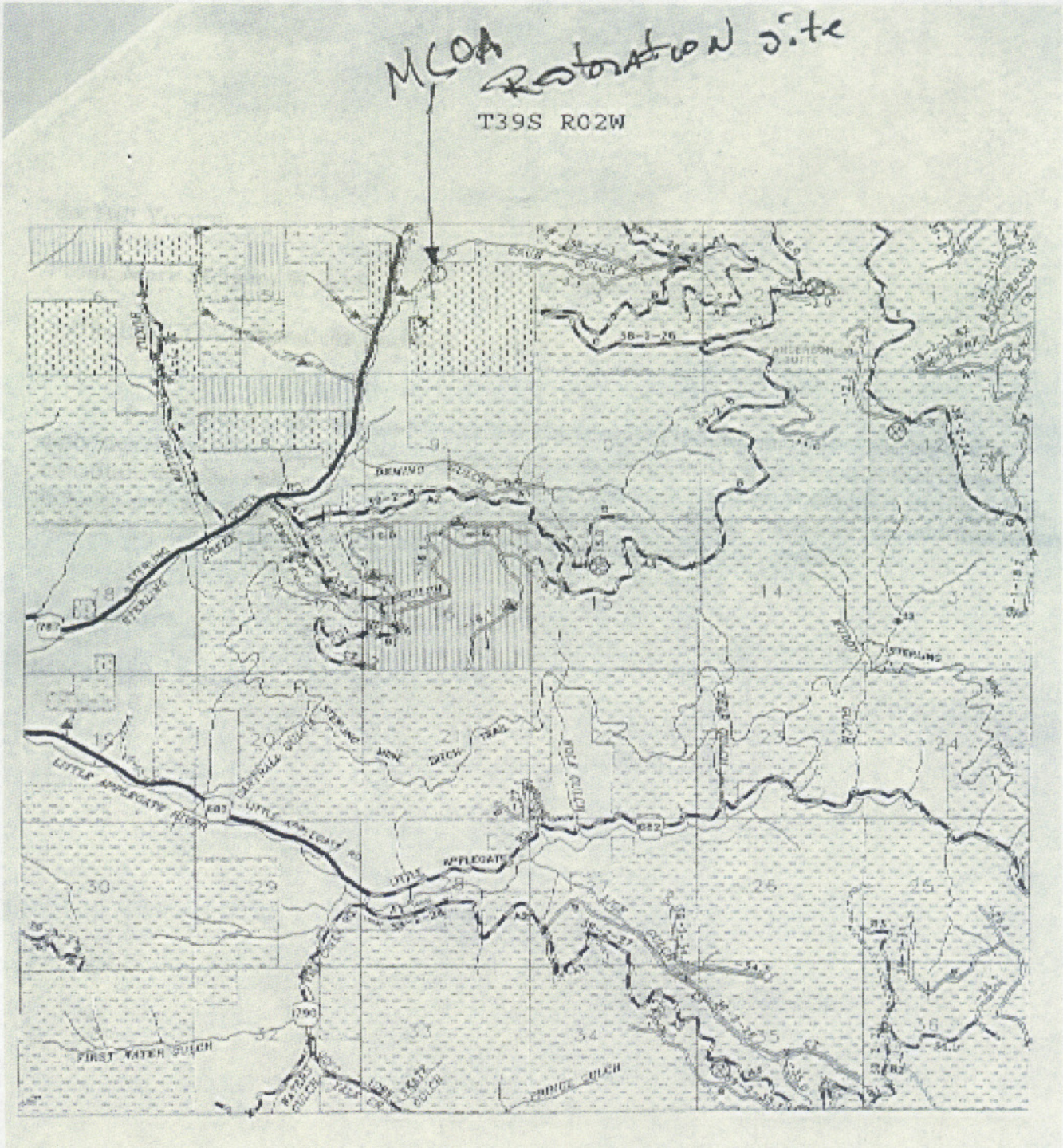
Notification

A copy of the EA was mailed to the following organizations:

- Applegate River Watershed Council
- Association of O&C Counties
- Audubon Society
- The Confederated Tribes
- Headwaters
- Jackson County Commissioners
- Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Oregon Natural Resource Council
- Rogue River National Forest
- Southern Oregon Timber Industry Association
- Star Ranger Station
- The Pacific Rivers Council
- Sierra Club, Rogue Group
- Southern Oregon University Library

Availability

A copy of this EA is available upon request from the Ashland Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management, 3040 Biddle Rd., Medford, OR 97540, (541) 618- 2384. The EA has also been placed in the public reading room at the Bureau of Land Management office (above address).


MLOA Restoration site
T39S R02W
STERLING CREEK
DEMING GULCH
STERLING MINE DITCH
LITTLE APPLEGATE RIVER
APPLEGATE
FIRST WATER GULCH
FRINGE GULCH
STERLING