



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
3040 BIDDLE ROAD
MEDFORD, OREGON 97504

ROGUE RIVER FUEL HAZARD REDUCTION PROJECT

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

- DRAFT -

A. Plan Consistency

Based on the information in the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River – Hellgate Recreation Section Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project’s Environmental Assessment, in the record, and from comments received to date from the public about the project, I conclude that the decisions in this Decision Record are consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl*, the *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines*, and the *Final EIS for the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River: Hellgate Recreation Area Management Plan*. They are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, The Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations, Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice, and Executive Order 13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution.

B. Finding of No Significant Impact

On the basis of the information contained in the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River – Hellgate Recreation Section Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project’s environmental assessment, the project’s record, and a consideration of the comments received to date from the public regarding the project, it is my determination that the proposed action will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. This project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR ' 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA.

- Context:

This project is located within the congressionally designated boundary of the Hellgate Recreation Section of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River. The project area includes two listed National Historic Register sites. The project area thus has national, as well as great local significance.

The land within the project area is a mosaic of federal and private ownership. It includes many residential sites and portions of three National Fire Plan designated Communities-at-Risk. The project has national and local significance for these reasons as well.

Protection of property, resource values, and the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values is of great importance.

The project was designed to preclude significant adverse environmental impacts. Project design precludes actions that will adversely affect ESA listed species. Special status species are also appropriately protected. The appearance of the forest and vegetation within the project area will be changed as a result of the decision. The characteristic landscape and the overall scenic quality of the river will not, however, be adversely affected. Treatments are designed to be incremental where necessary to minimize the short term visual impact of the treatments. In the longer term, the forest stands will begin to appear more as they were before the effective fire exclusion efforts of the last 80 – 100 years. The forest stands will be more vigorous, healthy and resilient. They will be less susceptible to high severity wildfire due to the changes in the inherent properties of vegetation density and structure, as well as being more defensible when wildfire occurs.

A severe wildfire of any extent would result in a loss of resource values as identified in the EA, as well as property values, and would likely result in a great diminishment of the scenic quality Outstandingly Remarkable Value.

- *Intensity:*

I have considered the potential intensity / severity of the impacts anticipated from this Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project proposed action relative to each of the ten areas suggested by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects. The assessment has considered both beneficial and adverse impacts. None of the individual or cumulative effects have been identified as being significant or outside of the scope of the EISs to which the project's EA is tied. Potential adverse impacts have been substantially or fully mitigated through project design.

2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety. No aspect of the project has been identified as having the potential to substantially and adversely impact public health or safety. Rather, the project will have a great beneficial impact on public health and safety within the Communities at Risk and the wildland urban interface (WUI) areas. There will be an appreciable portion of the project area moved from a high fuel hazard rating to a low or moderate rating as a result of the project. The number of days each year when weather conditions are such that wildfire might move into the crown or tree canopy and

be self sustaining would be decreased. The potential for severe wildfire, with consequent loss of property, resource and social / recreational values will be appreciably diminished. The safety of firefighters will be elevated as will the potential for them to successfully suppress a wildfire within the project area.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* As noted above, the Rogue River Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project is within the congressionally designated boundary of the Hellgate Recreation Section of the Rogue National Wild and Scenic River. It is clearly a unique and valued area with identified Outstandingly Remarkable Values. The decision will result in actions that will change existing conditions in the river corridor, but will also protect and enhance the values in both the short and the long term.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* Many of the effects of this project are similar in nature to those of many other vegetation treatment projects implemented within the scope of the Northwest Forest Plan and the Resource Management Plan. No unique or appreciable scientific controversy has been identified over the effects of the proposals. It is clear that there is controversy over the desirability of the effects that will arise, but not over the scientific basis for the effects.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis has not shown that there would be any unique or unknown risks to the human environment not previously considered and analyzed in EISs to which this decision is tiered.

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.* There has been no indication that this project will establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. It does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The project area is within designated recreational section of the river. It will not result in conditions incongruent with the Recreational designation. Resource management within such designated areas is the norm, not the exception. The decision will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No significant cumulative effects have been identified in the analysis or the public comments. The project design encompasses the full Recreational Section to ensure potential cumulative effects at that scale have been included. The project's anticipated environmental impacts have also been considered at the watershed scale.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The project area includes two listed National Historic Register sites or sites known to be eligible. Specific consideration will be given to these sites in the design of the pertinent neighborhood plans to ensure that these sites are protected. The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office will be consulted prior to making any final site specific decisions involving these sites. Cultural

sites will be protected per the project design features.

9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.

BLM's resource specialists have not identified any effects that will adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat. The analysis concluded that, while coho salmon, bald eagles, northern spotted owls, and Gentner's fritillary may be affected by some elements of the proposed actions, they will not be adversely affected. ESA consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA – Fisheries has been completed prior to the issuance of this Decision Record. They have concurred with the BLM's determination of "may affect, but not likely to adversely affect" (NLAA) these species and their designated critical habitat.

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.

There is no indication that this decision will result in actions that will threaten any such violation.

Abbie Jossie
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

Date