

September 4, 2003

Decision Record

Title: Little Canyon Mountain Fuels Reduction
Number: EA #OR 054-02-083
Office: Prineville District Bureau of Land Management
Central Oregon Resource Area
3050 NE 3rd St.
Prineville, OR 97754

The primary objectives of this project are to:

1. Reduce Hazardous Fuels on LCM and manage for surface fire types in order to protect resources on the mountain and adjacent urban areas from catastrophic loss.
2. Improve Fire Prevention and Suppression Opportunities on BLM managed lands within the project area.
3. Improve Forest Health by reducing stand densities and competition and stress among trees to promote healthier, more vigorous and robust tree stands which are more capable of resisting parasitic insect infestations.

The actions described in this Decision will result in a reduction of hazardous fuels and improvement in long term forest health and fire prevention and suppression opportunities without creating any significant impacts (consistent with the Finding of No Significant Impact – March 2003).

DECISION:

As a result of my review of the Environmental Assessment (EA)(# OR 054-02-083), Finding of No Significant Impact (March 26, 2003), John Day Resource Management Plan, comments received from the public throughout the process, including adjacent residents and the Little Canyon Mountain Working Group; and consultation with the resource specialists that prepared the project, it is my decision to implement a combination of alternatives that I feel best addresses the issues, concerns and objectives of this project. The combination of actions selected for implementation do not create any cumulative or synergistic impacts that have not already been disclosed within the analysis of the EA and therefore the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is still appropriate.

The forest vegetation treatments described in this decision were taken primarily from Alternative F. The road treatments, fence construction, culvert replacement and riparian vegetation treatments were taken primarily from Alternative D.

Federal Regulations mandate two distinct decision processes to implement the selected actions: 1) a Timber Sale Notice; and 2) a Decision Record.

- 1) All actions included in the Timber Sale Notice are subject to administrative remedies. Protests of the timber sale must be filed with the Prineville District BLM within 15-days of first publication of the Notice (September 9, 2003). See the Timber Sale notice in the September 9, 2003, edition of The Central Oregonian for further details.
- 2) The following detailed descriptions of remaining decisions are grouped by resource and include reference to the EA as well as rationale for the implementation. The pieces of this decision that are included in the Timber Sale Notice are also described (noted in italics).

Summary of Decisions:

The following decisions are grouped by resource and include reference to the EA as well as the rationale for implementation.

Forest Vegetation Treatments: The forest vegetation will be treated as described in Alternative F (see pages 64-69, Section 2.2.8 Alternative F – Stand Condition Stratified Treatment). This alternative proposes treatment on 1850-acres within the 2500-acre project boundary. *The Timber Sale Notice first published on September 9, 2003, will address commercial thinning on 586 acres (approximately 2,772 MBF) within a timber sale boundary located on the north side of Little Canyon Mountain.* Forest vegetation treatments contained within this Decision Record include:

- commercial thinning on the remaining 1264 acres (approximately 872 MBF)
- pre-commercial thinning on 1850 acres
- slash treatment and/or removal on 1850 acres

Rationale: This treatment is based on recognition of individual stand potential and capability. It takes into consideration accepted basal area ranges for healthy stands within each dominant vegetation type and, because of this, is expected to be sustainable over time. By reducing the competition within each stand, the ladder fuels and the proximity of crowns to each other, the treatment will reduce catastrophic fire risk, improve firefighter safety and improve forest health conditions while maintaining forest stand and wildlife habitat diversity in the area. This alternative has relatively minimal ground disturbance and provides for a beneficial economic return.

Wildlife Habitat Treatments: As described in Alternative F approximately 185 acres will be treated to a higher basal area range (100-150) to provide for wildlife hiding cover thickets. Mountain mahogany will be thinned in Whiskey Gulch and on the west side of the project area as described in both Alternatives C and F. *The Timber Sale Notice first published on September 9, 2003, will address 58-acres of the total described 185 acres for wildlife hiding cover thickets.* Wildlife habitat treatments contained within this Decision Record include:

- 127 acres for wildlife hiding cover thickets
- 26+-acres of mahogany thinning on primarily on the west side of the mountain

Rationale: These treatments will provide thicket and hiding cover for various species of wildlife. Treatments on mahogany will provide more vigorous forage for big game, while leaving those mahogany stand on the east side in their current condition to continue to provide wildlife food until the treated stands become more robust.

Road and Riparian Area Treatments: As described in Alternative D: approximately 10 acres of riparian overstory removal will be implemented; the culvert will be replaced; the main access road from the county road to the Forest Service boundary will be reconstructed; a portion of the main road will be re-routed, several miles of road closures and obliteration will occur on the Little Pine Creek claim (any decisions for road closures on roads within the Crystal Gulch #2 claim will be deferred until the mining claimants have been consulted); one mile of fence will be constructed near Little Pine Creek. *The Timber Sale Notice first published on September 9, 2003, will address 0.75 miles of road reconstruction (3700 feet of rocking and 200 feet of re-alignment).* The road and riparian treatments contained within this Decision Record include:

- 2.0 miles of road reconstruction (rocking)
- 0.5 miles of road realignment
- 5.0 miles of road closures
- 10-acres of riparian overstory treatments
- 1.0 mile of fence construction
- culvert replacement

Rationale: Road improvements and closures are focused on reducing erosion from the existing road surface and limiting the amount of sedimentation in Little Pine Creek, which contains habitat for mid-Columbia steelhead, a species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Reconstructing the road will decrease its impacts on the riparian and stream areas; however, surfacing will be with a rock that will not change the riding characteristics of the road. The overstory removal will alleviate competition with the hardwood species and allow the hardwoods to have more expression in the riparian zone, thereby promoting fish habitat and riparian function. The construction of the fence will allow better distribution of cattle on a grazing allotment and eliminate grazing impacts to the stream area. Replacing the culvert will allow for fish passage along Little Pine Creek.

Recreation Treatments: As described in Alternative D the pit area will be closed to vehicles greater than 50 inches in width and leave a forest buffer around the pit as described in Alternatives D and F. The recreation treatments contained within this Decision Record include:

- barrier placement at pit entry to prevent access to vehicles larger than 50 inches in width
- retain a 100 - 250 foot vegetated buffer between the pit and surrounding areas

Rationale: The pit area has become a dumping ground for garbage. The closure to vehicles greater than 50 inches will preclude truck and other vehicles that could transport garbage from entering the pit area and thereby eliminate dumping concerns.

Retaining the forested buffer will retain further management options for recreational use such as Off Highway Vehicle trails management, and will also provide a sound and sight barrier between the pit and the surrounding areas.

Consideration of mining needs: Mining claimants will be consulted on the timber needed to support their mining operations when trees are marked for removal. Site specific options could include cutting trees and decking them for future use by the claimants, or providing needed timber from other Public Lands.

Placement of wildlife thickets: Area to be left with higher basal areas for wildlife needs will be of a shape and location that best provides wildlife habitat needs, and will include consideration of any needs for corridors.

Removal of excess, down fuels and materials: The John Day Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (1985) call for disposal of slash concentrations in excess of 15 tons per acre. Because public concerns were expressed about the potential to carry fire through the area via the downed material already on the ground, thinning operations will also ensure that remaining material will not exceed the threshold specified in the EIS.

Short lived nature of snags that have been created from bug-kill: Because trees that have died from insect infestation remain standing for a relatively short amount of time, they will not as adequately provide snag habitat as trees that have died due to other factors. Every attempt will be made to leave as snags those trees that have died of something other than bug kill.

Minimize Noxious Weed Infestation: Because land that is disturbed can be particularly susceptible to noxious weed seed, all equipment mobilized to the site that will be used off of roads will be first washed to remove any seed that might be transported to the area.

Compliance and Monitoring:

For the purposes of evaluating compliance and effectiveness of the project with regard to the primary objectives the following monitoring efforts will be completed after implementation:

- Annual stand survey for three years measuring overall stand health and resistance to insects.
- Assessment of the functionality of Little Pine Creek in 2009 (TR 1737-15).
- Shade photography analysis within the riparian overstory removal stands before and after implementation.
- Fire suppression analysis of any fire occurring within the project boundary with regard to firefighter safety, rate of spread and damage to adjacent property.

Terms/Conditions/Stipulations:

On pages 41-43 (Section 2.2.4 Design Criteria Common to Alternatives C through F) all of these criteria will be implemented as design features of the project. These design criteria are all consistent with the FONSI.

On pages 31-34 (Section 2.2.2 Design Criteria Common to All Action Alternatives) all of these criteria will be implemented as design features of the project with the following **exceptions**:

v. Follow Northern Goshawk Management Guidelines for goshawks in the area.

Rationale: Fields surveys in both 2002 and 2003 found no goshawk nests in the proposed project area. However; if a goshawk nest is found during implementation of the Decision the Guidelines will be immediately implemented. Lack of need for this design criterion is based on field surveys following accepted protocols and will therefore not affect the determination in the FONSI.

vii. Schedule thinning operations and the creation of slash piles outside of the January to June window.

Rationale: The BLM recognizes the concern over insect populations in the area and wishes to minimize the extent to which insect damage continues. However, the primary concern of this project focuses on fire risk to the local communities and to forest health. Because of seasonal closures due to fire danger, and restrictions against yarding over wet ground, this additional restriction would leave virtually no time in which to accomplish work before the next fire season in 2004 and would result in not meeting our objectives. For this reason this design criteria will not be followed and efforts to chip and remove as much slash as possible from the area to prevent insect spread will be employed. Removal of this design criterion will not affect the determination in the FONSI.

Protest/Appeals:

Please take note that two separate decisions are made that require separate procedures for protests.

For the portions of the decision described in this Decision Record, the Decision Notice, first published on September 9, 2003, in The Central Oregonian, constitutes the decision document for purposes of protests, under 43 CFR subpart 5003 – Administrative remedies. Protests of any portion of this Decision Record must be filed within 15-days after the first publication of the Decision Notice, to the Prineville BLM at the above address.

For the portions of this decision included under the Timber Sale Notice, first published on September 9, 2003, in The Central Oregonian, the Timber Sale Notice constitutes the decision document for purposes of protests, under 43 CFR subpart 5003 - Administrative remedies. Protests of any sale listed in that notice must be received within 15 days after first publication of that notice, to the Prineville District BLM at the above address.

/s/Christina M. Welch

Christina M. Welch,
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Central Oregon Resource Area