

**Decision Record
And
Finding of No Significant Impact**

**Frazier Mountain Fuels Reduction Project
Environmental Assessment OR-035-01-15**

**Baker Resource Area
Vale District
Bureau of Land Management
Baker City, Oregon**

This Decision Record and finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents my decision to adopt the Frazier Mountain Fuels Reduction Project as presented under Alternative B in the Environmental Assessment (EA) OR-035-01-15. I have included in my decision, mitigation measures identified by my staff and concurred upon by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through consultation required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The EA is tiered to and the project is within the bounds of the Baker Resource Management Plan (RMP) Record of Decision (ROD, 1989).

Public Comments Review

Prior to the completion of the environmental analysis of this project, the Baker Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management solicited comments from local government, area landowners, grazing permittees, and other members of the public. A public meeting was held in Cove, Oregon on April 16, 2002 at which the BLM set forth the need for the proposed action, the activities to be undertaken, and the environmental effects of those activities.

Subsequent to the preparation of the EA, a Legal Notice setting forth the EA's availability for public comment was published. During the 30-day public comment period, only 3 comment letters were received, two of which were similar.

One of the comments indicated a concern about the BLM's assumption that the project area is composed of mixed conifer species but will be managed like a low elevation ponderosa pine stand. While the stands are mixed conifer, they still fall into the warm-dry bio-physical grouping. Historically, frequent fire maintained these stands in an open park-like condition with ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir. The exclusion of fire has allowed grand fir to dominate the stands. The treatments that are proposed will reduce the percentage of grand fir and make the stands more resilient to fire in the future.

Another comment expressed concern about harvesting large diameter trees, saying there are other values associated with large diameter trees (other than harvesting them for commercial purposes). The only large trees that would be harvested under Alternative B are those that are infected with dwarf mistletoe. While these infected trees do contain other values such as wildlife habitat, the action would not eradicate dwarf mistletoe from the area, just attempt to manage it at a level acceptable for forest health goals. The largest non-dwarf mistletoe infected trees would be retained. Removing infected trees will remove dwarf mistletoe from the stands thus making the stand more resilient to bark beetle attack.

There was a concern about the type of equipment to be used for logging/thinning and how the treatment sites would be maintained over the long-term. The type of equipment to be used is ground-based and specific mitigation items have been incorporated in the EA to prevent impacts to the soil resource. Treated areas would be monitored for fuel loading after project implementation. If monitoring data indicates the need to do a post treatment, a broadcast under-burn would be used to maintain the desired fire fuel loading and retard the re-establishment of less fire resistant tree species and shrubs.

Another comment indicated it was inadequate for the BLM to state surveys for species dependent on mixed conifer habitat be conducted when the trees are being marked. The EA indicates that surveys to determine presence will be conducted prior to management activities on BLM lands.

A concern was expressed that the BLM did not have detailed research included in the EA associated with action items, such as the viability of wildlife species in a specific area or that thinning reduces fire risk and severity and restores habitat. The BLM has used all applicable research known to develop the proposed action. Generally, the BLM does not conduct extensive, site-specific research and monitoring prior to implementing project proposals. The BLM extrapolates and interprets research results published in professional journals or reports to guide the implementation of best management practices.

The BLM received a comment regarding the lack of an extensive soils analysis. The ID Team analyzed the various treatment methods and their possible impacts to the soils resources. There were no major issues identified. Specific mitigation items have been included in the EA to address any concerns/impacts to the soil resources.

Several other comments were received that were either outside the scope of this analysis or were already addressed in the environmental assessment, therefore no further analysis of these comments will occur.

Decision

My decision to select the proposed alternative (Alternative B), is based upon the interdisciplinary analysis contained in EA OR-035-01-15, a copy of which is attached or may be obtained at the above address, as well as the supporting record, extensive field review, public comments received, and consultation with the FWS and NMFS. Pursuant to 43 CFR 5003.2 (c), it must be noted that this decision is necessitated by exceedingly poor forest health conditions within the project area. Overstocking of trees has led to insect and dwarf mistletoe infestations, which have caused tremendous mortality. This, in turn, has led to dramatically increased fuel loads. Given these conditions and direction identified under the National Fire Plan (NFP), I have decided to implement these action items through the implementation of Alternative B.

A copy of the Decision Record and Environmental Assessment may be obtained by writing to the Baker Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management, 3165 10th Street, Baker City, Oregon 97814 or by calling (541) 523-1256. It can also be viewed on the BLM Vale District website at www.or.blm.gov/Vale.

All mitigation measures, design features and monitoring processes described in the EA are incorporated into the project implementation plans. Among these are:

- ❑ Cultural resources will be avoided during treatment.
- ❑ Existing roads in the project area will be used. No new roads would be constructed during the implementation of this project.
- ❑ Retention of down logs and snags on which wildlife rely would follow RMP guidelines (RMP, p.39).
- ❑ If northern goshawk, cougar, or other sensitive species habitat are found in the project area, that habitat would be avoided. In general, treatments would be scheduled to avoid or minimize disturbance of wildlife.
- ❑ Streamside buffers would be implemented to protect riparian habitat.
- ❑ Treatments would be designed to create a vegetation mosaic in areas with crucial wildlife habitat.
- ❑ Tree yarding would be done with ground-based equipment and existing skid trails will be used whenever possible.
- ❑ Slash piles would be burned in late fall or early winter. This would minimize the risk of fire spread as well as impact to soils.

Two action alternatives and a no-action alternative were considered. Alternative C, an action alternative, was designed to reduce the existing fire hazard and advanced conifer regeneration without commercial timber harvesting. This alternative was not selected because the stocking levels in the overstory would remain at extremely high levels and the forested stands would remain susceptible to bark beetles infestation. In addition, the current level of mistletoe infection would remain in the stands and would increase over time.

The no action alternative, (Alternative A) was not selected because it would leave the existing conditions untreated. If left untreated, the forested land in the proposed project area would continue to suffer from dwarf mistletoe infestation damage and extremely high fuel loading/hazard levels. Because the BLM bears the responsibility for the sound management of public lands under its care, which lands it holds in trust for the current and future generations of Americans, the no action alternative was not viable.

Decision Rationale

The proposed project will have no effect on Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Cultural and Historic Values, Environmental Justice, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Floodplains, Tribal Concerns and Treaty Rights, Solid and Hazardous Wastes, Groundwater Quality, Wetlands and Riparian Areas, Wild & Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness Areas. No disproportionately high adverse human or environmental impacts on minority or low-income populations or Indian tribes are likely to result from the proposed action.

Finding Of No Significant Impact

While any land management activity invariably and by definition entails environmental effects, I have determined, based upon the analysis of environmental impacts contained in the referenced EA (OR-035-01-15), that the potential impacts raised by the proposed project will not be significant and that, therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. In relation to context, the project's affected region is localized, and the effects of implementation are relevant to the people living in the area. In relation to intensity or severity, the actions have mitigation features to protect public health and safety; there are no unique characteristics involved; there is no apparent controversy about the quality of the human environment; there are no highly uncertain or unique or unknown risks; this project does not set a precedent for future actions that could have significant effects; the action does not appear to be related to any other action that could be significant; there are no impacts to sites that could be listed on the National Register of Historic Places or cause a loss of scientific, cultural, or historic resources; there is no significant impact to any species listed by the ESA; there is no violation of any law or requirement protecting the environment.

Timing of the Decision

This decision record constitutes the decision document for all non-timber sale activities described under Alternative B, EA #OR-035-01-15 in accordance with 43 CFR 5003 – Administrative Remedies. The decision document for the timber sale portion will be published at a later date in accordance with 43 CFR 5003.2.

Protest Period

Protest of this decision must be within 15 days after the publication of this notice (43 CFR 5003-Administrative Remedies). The public notice shall be published in The Observer. The decision for the timber sale will be the sale notice (43 CFR 5003.2.b) and will be dealt with in a subsequent publication.

s/ Penelope Dunn Woods

January 31, 2003

Penelope Dunn Woods
Field Manager
Baker Resource Area, Vale District

Date