



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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BOBAR LANDS CAPE MANAGEMENT PROJECT DECISION RECORD / RATIONALE / FONSI #2 EA No. OR-110-02-27

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bobar Landscape Project is a comprehensive forest management action within the Lower Little Applegate and Applegate-McKee sub watersheds of the Applegate River Watershed. Planning for the Bobar Landscape project has been ongoing for a number of years. The objective of the project is to provide a broad evaluation of current conditions on BLM lands in the project area, develop site specific short and long term desired conditions, and to design a multi-faceted project that begins implementation of activities to move towards those desired future conditions. The result is a project that includes a set of forest management and transportation system activities for long term watershed management. It provides treatments of both commercial and non-commercial vegetation and provides for maintenance and development of the transportation system required for continued long term management.

II. BACKGROUND

The BLM's interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Bobar Landscape Management Project based on: (a) current resource conditions in the project area and (b) to meet the objectives and direction of the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP) and the Northwest Forest Plan. The proposals presented and evaluated in the Bobar Landscape Management Project's Environmental Assessment (EA) reflect what the planning team determined to be the best balance and integration of resource conditions, resource potential, competing management objectives and expressed interests of the various communities that have a stake in the project.

The Bobar project was planned on a landscape scale. Planning projects at the landscape scale allows managers to meet comprehensive ecosystem restoration goals. The treatment objectives for forest health, wildlife enhancement, aquatic habitat, and fire hazard reduction are incorporated into the project plan. Project planning involves understanding broad scale interrelationships for entire landscapes and adjacent watersheds. Road systems, streams, forest and non-forest plant communities, and wildlife habitat are all analyzed and assessed for potential improvements.

The primary focuses of the BLM's forest management activities for the Bobar project are to:

- Enhance and maintain the ecological health of the public lands
- Restore the vigor, resilience, and stability of forest vegetation
- Reduce the risk of high intensity wildfire and subsequent tree mortality
- Monitor forest health and fire hazard reduction techniques
- Restore tree species tolerant of fire and drought
- Provide some of the forest product commodity needs of the human population

This Decision Record addresses only a portion of the project area and proposals presented and analyzed in the EA. In March of 2003, Decision Record #1 was issued to authorize activities to begin on a portion of the non-commercial units in the project (Non-commercial units 1-13 and units 18-29). This Decision Record addresses the remaining activities proposed in the Bobar Landscape EA.

Extensive outreach and dialog with the public has taken place. Outreach approaches included letters, articles in local newspapers, community meetings, field trips and discussions with individuals and groups. Initial public outreach started in February of 2001. The Environmental Assessment was published and sent out for public review in December, 2002. An amendment to the EA was sent out for public review in July of 2003.

The BLM's interdisciplinary planning team has designed the Bobar Landscape project in a manner that strives to be sensitive to the range of views and values, to the resource management mandates that are set forth in the various pertinent laws and resource plans, and to the current resource conditions in the project area. In designing and presenting an integrated project plan, the planning team has created what it believes to be the best balance of these factors and objectives.

III. DECISION

It is my decision to implement the actions proposed as Alternative B & D in the Bobar Landscape Project Environmental Assessment and Addendum #1 (EA #110-02-27, December 2002 & Addendum #1, July 2003) as outlined below.

1. Variable prescription commercial thinning would occur on approximately 2,588 acres of forested stands. Pre-commercial thinning (thinning of young conifer stands) would occur on 550 acres overlapping and within the commercial units.
2. Non-commercial treatments (mechanical thinning, hand thinning, and prescribed fire) would occur in all commercial treated stands and on approximately 2,286 acres of young conifer stands, shrubland, hardwoods, and grasslands.
3. Approximately 5.8 miles of new road would be constructed in three separate areas. Road 39-3-15.1 would not be built as described in Alternative B. Road 39-3-10.0 would be built as described in Alternative D of the Bobar Landscape Project Addendum #1.

4. Road decommissioning would take place on approximately 7.2 miles of existing roads (6.7 miles within the Bobar project area, 0.5 miles on the same ridge but outside of the project area boundary).
5. Approximately 24 miles of existing roads in the project area would be renovated to help stabilize, improve drainage and reduce sediment production.
6. The project design features described in the EA and EA amendment are considered to be integral parts of the proposed action and are to be implemented, *except* for protection measures for two species of lichens. As a result of the 2002 Northwest Forest Plan Annual Species Review, *Bryoria tortuosa* and *Dendriscoaulon intricatum* have been removed from the list of species requiring Survey and Manage Protection Buffers. These species no longer require pre-disturbance surveys or protection buffers where found, therefore none were implemented.

IV. DECISION RATIONALE

The No Action Alternative was rejected because it does not meet the objectives identified in the Medford District Resource Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan. It would not address or alter many of the existing resource conditions and trends that are of major concern relative to healthy forest conditions and resource and property protection. The No Action alternative would perpetuate or promote undesirable resource conditions. With No Action, these conditions would not be improved or mitigated; certain undesirable ecological trends would continue unchanged and, in some cases, would be exacerbated with the passage of time. For example, stand vigor and forest health would continue to decline, high fire hazard conditions would continue and grow, existing erosion problems would continue uncorrected, the successional trends that are contributing to a loss of pine and oak habitats would continue, and certain beneficial economic opportunities in the adjacent communities would be foregone.

The overall rationale for the decision is that it implements the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Northwest Forest Plan, the BLM's Strategic Plan and the National Fire Plan. The decision will meet the purpose and need outlined in the EA as it pertains to contributing to meeting the District's commitment and responsibility for timber harvest. The decision will meet the other broad purpose and need for the management of the involved public lands in a manner that will provide and promote a wide range of non-commodity outputs and conditions that will maintain vigorous, healthy and more sustainable forest conditions. Each of the elements of the decision reflect the best effort and course of action, based on current conditions and public input, to meet the more specific objectives (i.e., purpose / need) outlined in the EA.

The wide variety of silvicultural prescriptions proposed are closely tailored to the existing forest conditions, to the issues identified in the Little Applegate Watershed Analysis, and to the forest management objectives set by the RMP and the NFP. The treatments will result in forest stand

conditions that will increase the potential for healthy forest conditions in the short and long term. Existing watershed conditions are expected to improve through the implementation of the road restoration treatments of this project. Implementation of this decision will help meet the long term goals of restoring vegetation conditions that are more resistant to catastrophic fire, drought and insect events. There were no effects identified that would prevent attainment of the Northwest Forest Plan, provincial/regional landscape objectives or primary land allocation objectives of the Medford District Resource Management Plan. Implementation and post-treatment evaluations will be conducted to evaluate the successes and effectiveness of these treatments.

The fire and fuel treatment proposals are adopted because, without implementation, there will be a continued increase in fuel loadings and fire hazard. This increase will be due to both the current vegetation successional trends and fuels produced by the vegetation treatments. Addressing both the “natural fuels” and the activity generated fuels is critical in the Little Applegate and Applegate-McKee watersheds due to the high resource and property values. Natural fire frequencies that historically served to maintain lower fuel loadings and reduce fire hazard have been severely altered by many years of fire exclusion. As many community members pointed out, fuel hazard continues to grow and there is an urgent need for activities to reduce fuel loading on both public and private lands in the Bobar Landscape project area. Reducing fire hazard in western forests and in the wildland-urban interface zones is currently a national initiative in the BLM and Forest Service. Implementation and post-treatment evaluations will be conducted to evaluate the successes and effectiveness of these treatments.

The implementation of the proposed action will require numerous contracts including a number of small contracts specifically designed to provide employment and training opportunities to the local workforce. It will provide both economic and personal use opportunities to the local community and is thus responsive to concerns expressed by the public during project planning. In addition to the more traditional contracting approaches used, the Bobar project is expected to utilize a Stewardship contract which will combine the removal of commercial sized timber along with non-commercial thinning, tree planting, roadside brushing, road decommissioning and slash disposal in a comprehensive package. Adopting proposals to investigate, evaluate and implement, where possible and efficient, new contracting strategies reflects the BLM’s commitment to provide a broader array of contract methods and opportunities to local entrepreneurs and workers.

Transportation system objectives for long term management include renovating existing roads, decommissioning roads that are no longer needed or in inappropriate locations and creating new carefully designed roads that minimize resource impacts. Multiple existing roads will be decommissioned or gated by implementing the project. BLM proposed road 39-3-10 will be gated as it leaves private land and enters BLM land. The access to the private land is also gated. The decommissioning and gating of road 39-3-27-2 will help to inhibit off highway vehicles from attempting to travel off road between the terminations of roads 39-3-10 and 39-3-27-2.

National Fire Plan: The majority of the Bobar Landscape planning area is within the wildland/urban interface (WUI). Private residential lands on Little Applegate Road and Upper Applegate Road have been identified as a Community at Risk under the National Fire Plan (Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 3). Consequently, special regional and national level attention is placed on this area as a wildland/urban interface community within the vicinity of Federal lands that are at high risk from wildfire. Much of the project area has high risk fire regimes and is classified as fire condition classes two or three under the Department of the Interior's "Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health". The fire regimes in these fire condition classes have been moderately to significantly altered from their historical range of fire frequency. To restore them to their historical fire regimes, these lands require some level of restoration through mechanical and prescribed fire treatments (Integrating Fire and Natural Resource Management – A Cohesive Strategy for Protecting People by Restoring Land Health, DOI, March 2001 Draft). The Bobar Landscape project includes a range of management actions directed at this restoration and at reducing the high wildfire risk on Federal lands.

Healthy Forests - An Initiative for Wildfire Prevention and Stronger Communities: The Bobar Landscape project includes management actions that are congruent with the goals of the President's August 22, 2002 Healthy Forests Initiative. The Bobar Landscape project includes a great deal of work focusing on reducing wild fire hazard to protect communities and resources, promoting healthy forest ecosystems and providing a framework for further local collaboration to accomplish these goals.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Biological Assessment dated July 18, 2001; Biological Opinion #1-7-01-F-032 dated October 21, 2001). The Service has determined that the proposed action will not jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl or adversely modify critical habitat.

Pursuant to the ESA, consultation was completed with the National Marine Fisheries Service. In their February 26, 2003 letter of concurrence, the Service concurred with the BLM's determination that the actions proposed in the Bobar Landscape Project EA were "not likely to adversely affect" (NLAA) the SONC coho salmon.

A no effect determination was made by BLM regarding the federally listed plant species *Fritillaria gentneri*.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was notified of this project in accordance with 36 CFR §800.5(b). They have raised no objection to the BLM's finding that it would not adversely impact sites of cultural or historic significance.

The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz and of the Grand Ronde were notified of this project during the scoping process and the public comment period for the EA. Jackson County Commissioners were also notified.

VI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public notification and involvement for the Bobar Landscape Project was initiated in February, 2001 with the start of small scale neighborhood meetings to discuss forest management with local residents. A scoping notice to individuals and organizations which had previously requested to be notified of such projects, Jackson County officials, Native American Tribes, and adjacent private landowners was mailed on March 19, 2001. The EA addresses issues raised as a result of this scoping. Subsequent public involvement opportunities included community meetings, project areas tours, meetings and discussions with interested individuals and organizations, and a 60 day formal public comment period on the EA.

All Public input received regarding the Bobar Landscape project was carefully reviewed and evaluated. Many comments were received regarding both the substance of the Bobar Landscape project and the individual's preferences about the Bobar Landscape proposals and the management of the BLM administered land in the Little Applegate watershed. Comments received since the public distribution of the EA in December of 2002 and the amendment in July 2003, did not provide any substantially new information or new analysis. Nor did it identify substantial new data gaps that would indicate additional analysis is needed. These comments also did not identify any significant new data which would alter the effects described in the environmental assessment.

VII. CONCLUSION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

A. Plan Consistency

Based on the information in the Bobar Landscape EA and in the record, 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 and, the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manager, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001). These decisions are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, The Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations. They are also consistent with Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

This decision will not have any adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution (per Executive Order 13212). The Bobar Landscape Project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment and an

environmental impact statement (EIS) (or supplement to the existing EISs) is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This 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 and based on my understanding of the project, review of the project analysis and review of public comments. As noted above, the analysis of effects has been completed within the context of the Medford District's Resource Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan. This conclusion is consistent with those plans and the scope of effects anticipated from those plans. The analysis of effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of impacts.

I have considered the intensity of the impacts anticipated from the Bobar Landscape Project 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 attributable to implementing the project have been identified as being significant and outside of the scope of the EISs to which the project's EA is tiered.

2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety. No aspects of the project have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. The fuel and fire hazard reduction elements of the project are likely to have a beneficial impact on public health and safety, particularly within the rural interface areas. 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.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. As described in the EA, no significant effects to natural or cultural resources were identified for the proposed action. There is no evidence that prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas will be negatively affected. In the long-term, improvements to water quality are expected to occur from maintenance of existing road drainage deficiencies. There will be no major, adverse impacts to wetlands from the implementation of the proposed action.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. The effects of the Bobar project are similar in nature to those of many other projects that are implemented within the scope of the Northwest Forest Plan and the Medford Resource Management Plan. As evidenced by the public comments received regarding the Bobar project, there is a full range of debate and opinions about the potential effects of land management activities as well as the effects of continued fire exclusion. A number of comments received implied controversy concerning the effectiveness of thinning and fire behavior. On

review of these comments, it appears that conclusions were sometimes drawn using partial reports and statements taken out of context. When reviewing the original reports in full, the controversy was limited. Neither the EA analysis nor the public comments identified any areas where there was a significant or unique level of controversy about the effects that would result from the Bobar project. A level of uncertainty exists in assessing the changes that may occur as a result of any land management project. This uncertainty is acknowledged by the EISs to which the Bobar EA is tiered.

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 does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks outside of those addressed and anticipated in the Medford District Resource Management Plan EIS and the Northwest Forest Plan EIS.

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.* The action and the decision will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. It is one of many similar projects designed to implement the Resource Management Plan and Northwest Forest Plan.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* Analysis was conducted for this project and no significant cumulative impacts have been identified outside of those addressed and anticipated in the Medford District Resource Management Plan EIS and the Northwest Forest Plan EIS. Analysis was performed at multiple scales and included current conditions and foreseeable future actions.

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 has been surveyed for cultural and historic resources. The proposed action will not affect objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is it expected to cause destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* The Bobar project includes project design features that preclude adverse impacts on ESA listed species. ESA consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has been completed with the official determination that the project is not likely to adversely affect listed T&E species. A no effect determination was made by BLM regarding the federally listed plant species *Fritillaria gentneri*.

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 a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection laws. Project Design Features are included to ensure compliance with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality water quality objectives.

Consultation and Coordination

Pursuant with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Biological Assessment dated July 18, 2001; Biological Opinion #1-7-01-F-032 dated October 21, 2001). The Service has determined that the proposed action will not jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl or adversely modify critical habitat.

Pursuant to the ESA, consultation was completed with the National Marine Fisheries Service. In their February 26, 2003 letter of concurrence, the Service concurred with the BLM's determination that the actions proposed in the Bobar Landscape Project EA were "not likely to adversely affect" (NLAA) the SONC coho salmon.

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08-25-03
Date