

Appendix G

Visual Resources Specialist Report

Resource: Visual

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a. Past Visual Resources Management Actions:

The BLM John Day Resource Management Plan (RMP) (USDI BLM, 1985) identified the visual values on public lands within the planning area and established visual management objectives for these lands, according to BLM's Visual Resource Management (VRM) policy (USDI BLM, 1984). The RMP identified the visual management objectives for the public lands within the LCM project area as Class II, which BLM's VRM policy defines as:

“Class II Objective. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.” (USDI BLM, 1986, page 6.)

According to BLM's VRM policy, visual design considerations are to be incorporated into all surface-disturbing projects regardless of size or potential impact. The Visual Resource Contrast Rating process (USDI BLM, 1986) is used by the BLM as a visual design tool in project design and as a project assessment tool during environmental review. It is a systematic process used to analyze potential visual impacts of proposed projects and activities. The degree to which a management activity affects the visual quality of a landscape depends on the visual contrast created between a project and the existing landscape. The contrast rating system is a means for determining whether the proposed project conforms with the approved VRM objectives and provides a means to identify mitigating measures that can be taken to minimize adverse visual impacts. Contrast ratings are required for proposed projects in highly sensitive areas or high impact projects.

b. Brief Existing Environment/Condition Summary:

The LCM project area is located 2 miles southeast of John Day and immediately southeast of Canyon City, OR, and comprises a major feature in the viewshed of these communities. LCM is a conical shaped mountain rising in elevation from approximately 3,600 feet at the base to 6,600 feet at the summit. The project area primarily includes the north, northwest and northeast facing

slopes of the mountain. These aspects make the project area visible from many common viewing areas including the cities of John Day and Canyon City, sections of U.S. Highways 26 and 395, housing subdivisions in the area, and several well-traveled county roads.

From most viewing areas, the north slopes of LCM generally appear in the foreground or mid-ground, sloping up and away from the viewer. In the background the top of Canyon Mountain is visible, rising up behind LCM to an elevation of 7,874 feet. Just outside the project area, to the east, a long high ridge is visible leading up to Canyon Mountain. From some viewing areas, low hills at the base of LCM are visible in the foreground and partially obscure the lower elevations of LCM. The southeast portion of the project area is obscured from most common viewing areas as it is located in a basin between LCM and Canyon Mountain.

Beyond the immediate project area, LCM is surrounded on three sides by mountains which include both public and private ownership. To the east and west are private timbered lands which have visible evidence of past forest thinning. To the south is USFS land, most of which is included in the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness Area. A past wildfire in the wilderness has left areas of standing and fallen grey-colored snags, and bare unforested areas, visible just behind and above the main northeast-southwest ridge of LCM. To the north of the project area, low hills flank the base of LCM, bisected by numerous drainages cutting north towards the John Day River. The appearance of the hills has been altered by past activities including mining, fire, road building, cutting of timber and juniper, and clearing of vegetation for agricultural purposes. A few homes and ranch buildings are scattered throughout the hills.

The characteristic landscape is described from five key observation points. Each observation point provides a slightly different view, but the general character of the landscape remains constant. The landscape type is a feature landscape, in which the project area, LCM, is the dominant feature. The dominance elements are form and vegetative texture. Natural patterns tend to be relatively triangular, caused by the ridgelines of LCM, the foreground hills, and the high peaks in the background. Strong continuity in color and texture is established on LCM by the nearly complete tree canopy. Depending on available lighting, patches of red insect-infested trees are noticeable within the solid dark green forest of LCM. However, a variety of texture and color is provided in the mountains behind and to either side of LCM, and in the low grassy hills in the foreground.

c. Existing Environment/Condition:

The LCM project area is located 2 miles southeast of John Day and immediately southeast of Canyon City, OR, and comprises a major feature in the viewshed of these communities. LCM is a conical shaped mountain rising in elevation from approximately 3,600 feet at the base to 6,600 feet at the summit. The project area primarily includes the north, northwest and northeast facing slopes of the mountain. These aspects make the project area visible from many common viewing areas include the cities of John Day and Canyon City, sections of U.S. Highways 26 and 395, housing subdivisions in the area, and several well-traveled county roads.

From most viewing areas, the north slopes of LCM generally appear in the foreground or mid-ground, sloping up and away from the viewer. In the background the top of Canyon Mountain is

visible, rising up behind LCM to an elevation of 7,874 feet. Just outside the project area, to the east, a long high ridge is visible leading up to Canyon Mountain. From some viewing areas, low hills at the base of LCM are visible in the foreground and partially obscure the lower elevations of LCM. The southeast portion of the project area is obscured from most common viewing areas as it is located in a basin between LCM and Canyon Mountain.

Beyond the immediate project area, LCM is surrounded on three sides by mountains which include both public and private ownership. To the east and west are private timbered lands which have visible evidence of past forest thinning. To the south is USFS land, most of which is included in the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness Area. A past wildfire in the wilderness has left areas of standing and fallen grey-colored snags, and bare unforested areas, visible just behind and above the main northeast-southwest ridge of LCM. To the north of the project area, low hills flank the base of LCM, bisected by numerous drainages cutting north towards the John Day River. The appearance of the hills has been altered by past activities including mining, fire, road building, cutting of timber and juniper, and clearing of vegetation for agricultural purposes. A few homes and ranch buildings are scattered throughout the hills.

The landscape type can be described as a feature landscape, in which the project area, LCM, is the dominant feature. The dominance elements are form and vegetative texture. Natural patterns tend to be relatively triangular, caused by the ridgelines of LCM, the foreground hills, and the high peaks in the background. Strong continuity in color and texture is established on LCM by the nearly complete tree canopy. Depending on available lighting, patches of red insect-infested trees are noticeable within the solid dark green forest of LCM. However, a variety of texture and color is provided in the mountains behind and to either side of LCM, and in the low grassy hills in the foreground.

Five key observation points (KOPs) were selected from which to study the characteristic landscape and to analyze the affects of each alternative action. These points were selected as KOPs because they provide a variety of different angles and distances of observation, as seen from a range of likely observation points. The KOPs include the Canyon City Post Office, the intersection of County Roads 52 and 52A (Boot Hill Cemetery road), the Grant County Airport, the Ironwood Estates Subdivision, and the Canyon Mountain Heights Subdivision. An additional KOP was considered on US Hwy. 26 east of John Day, but not brought forward because it was determined that LCM would be visible in the background from this viewpoint, and that proposed actions would have less affect on visual resources when viewed from this distance than when viewed from the five KOPs closer to the project area.

The Canyon City Post Office (KOP #1) is located just off of US Hwy 395 in the center of Canyon City at an elevation of approximately 3,160 feet. From this KOP, the landscape type is a feature landscape in which two features are dominant; a large, rounded hill in the middle-ground, and the upper elevations of LCM in the background. Two interesting structures appear in the foreground; a historic building constructed of flat tan rocks and mortar, and a block-shaped building painted with a colorful mural of the surrounding mountains. Rising up directly behind the structures is the rounded hill, behind which rises LCM. The dominance elements are form and vegetative color. The rounded form of the hill in the middle-ground partially blocks the lower elevations of LCM, though the east and west flanks of LCM are visible on either side of

the hill. Above the hill, LCM appears as a flattened triangular shape outlined against the sky. The viewer's attention is drawn to a swath of altered vegetation on one half of the hill, extending from top to bottom. Caused by a past wildfire, the burned area appears as a square shape consisting of gold grasses sparsely dotted with small dark green juniper trees. The gold square area contrasts sharply with the green, denser juniper/sagebrush community on the other half of the hill, and the nearly solid dark green forest canopy of LCM. A few areas of red insect-infested trees can be seen on those lower portions of LCM not obscured by the hill.

The intersection of County Roads 52 and 52A (KOP #2) is located just east of downtown Canyon City, in the midst of the low hills at the base of LCM, at an elevation of approximately 3,540 feet. From this KOP the landscape type is a feature landscape in which the project area, LCM, is the dominant feature. The observer looks directly at the north slope of LCM and the mountain makes up the majority of the view. In the immediate foreground is a low hill, and to the extreme east in the background, a high ridge of Canyon Mountain can be seen. The dominance elements are form and vegetative texture. LCM is a massive triangular form which dominates the viewshed and provides a continuous texture of forest canopy. Variety in texture is provided in a gold, smooth-textured low hill in the immediate foreground, and a small area of gold grasses dotted with green spots resulting from a past wildfire, located at the base of LCM on the far west side of the viewshed. In the distant background to the far east of the viewshed, bare unforested areas can be seen along a ridge of Canyon Mountain, caused by a past forest fire. Patches of reddish-brown bug-infested trees can be seen scattered amongst the dark green of the forest canopy in the lower half of LCM.

The Grant County Airport (KOP #3), is located between John Day and Canyon City on a flat hill 700 feet above Canyon Creek and the adjacent US Hwy 395 at an elevation of 3,697 feet. From this KOP the landscape type is a feature landscape in which the project area, LCM, is the dominant feature. The observer looks across to low hills in the foreground, LCM rising up in the mid-ground, and a long high ridge leading up to Canyon Mountain in the background. The dominance elements are form and vegetative texture. LCM provides a strong triangular form and a continuous texture and color of the forest canopy. Variety in form, color and texture is provided along the Canyon Mountain ridge where a range of green tree densities is mixed with areas of standing and fallen snags, and bare burned areas. The result is irregular shaped openings created by fire, a seasonal variation of color between trees and in openings, and a variety of vegetative textures from smooth to coarse. In the low hills below the ridge, past timber activities are evidenced by visible grey/brown colored soil and roadcuts, and a coarser tree texture. Variety in color and texture is also provided by the low rolling hills in the foreground that are primarily gold, grassy hills sparsely dotted with dark green trees. A few gold, smooth-textured fields which have been cleared of trees and shrubs are scattered throughout the low hills at the base of LCM, offering a contrast in color and texture to the forest above.

The Ironwood Estates Subdivision (KOP #4), is located on a hill just north of the city of John Day at an elevation of approximately 3,250 feet. From this KOP the landscape type is a feature landscape in which LCM and Canyon Mountain are the dominant features. The observer looks down on the city of John Day and the surrounding low hills in the foreground, across to LCM in the mid-ground, and slightly up to Canyon Mountain in the background. The dominance elements are form and vegetative texture. A strong triangular form repeats itself in the two

mountains, LCM and Canyon Mountain. The vegetative texture is a homogenous forest canopy across LCM. Variety in form, color and texture is provided in the background along the Canyon Mountain ridge. Here varied tree density and an old burn area create spaces and openings in the forest, providing a variety of vegetative textures and seasonal color variations. Variety in texture and color is also provided in the low foreground hills consisting of gold, smooth-textured grass, sparsely dotted with juniper trees.

The Canyon Mountain Heights Subdivision (KOP #5) is located in Canyon City about ½ mile northwest of the Canyon City Post Office. The subdivision sits on a bench about 160 feet above the west side of Canyon Creek at an elevation of approximately 3,300 feet. From this KOP the landscape type is a feature landscape in which the dominant feature is LCM. The dominance element is form. Situated above and out of view of Canyon City, the observer looks from the subdivision, across a flat bench, to triangular-shaped LCM. Portions of Canyon Mountain can be seen behind the east flank of LCM, and two rounded hills are visible in the middle-ground. In the foreground is the bench on which the subdivision homes will be built. A strong horizontal line is visible at the edge of the flat bench, eliminating the view of everything below that elevation line. A nearly continuous ridgeline of trees is visible on LCM except for an area on the extreme west skyline, which has sparser tree density due to a previous wildfire and subsequent timber salvage. A dark green forest canopy on LCM is intermittently interrupted by blotches of red insect-infested trees. A past wildfire on one of the mid-ground hills is visible as an abrupt change in color and texture compared with surrounding vegetation. Gold grass is visible in one small agricultural field, and in the burned area, which appears sparsely dotted with the dark green young trees.

Travelers heading south on US Hwy 395 from John Day to Canyon City view the north and northwest facing slopes of LCM in the mid-ground (at about the 10 o'clock position) for about 2 miles. The view of LCM is partially obscured by low hills in the foreground and is similar to that described from KOP # 1, the Canyon City Post Office. From Canyon City south, the management area is directly to the west of the highway (at 9 o'clock) for approximately three miles. For the first two miles the road travels through a narrow section of canyon formed by Canyon Creek. Here, LCM slopes up very steeply from the road so that only the lower 150 feet of the mountain are visible from inside a vehicle. After this point, the canyon opens up slightly, offering a view of the steep west slopes of LCM for the final mile.

Travelers heading north on US Hwy 395 begin to view the south and southwest facing aspects of LCM about 3.5 miles south of Canyon City. Here the west and southwest slopes of LCM are visible rising steeply up and away from the highway for about one mile, after which point the canyon narrows making only the lower 150 feet of the mountain visible.

Travelers heading west on US Highway 26 from Prairie City towards John Day view LCM for several miles in the background to the southwest (at approximately the 11 o'clock position). The setting sun backlights the north-south ridgeline of the mountain making trees on top of the ridge stand out to the viewer. As the driver continues west on Hwy 26, the mountain remains in the background until it is obscured by low hills located between the highway and the mountain. When traveling east on US Hwy 26, the view of LCM is obscured by low hills in the foreground. The Transamerica Bicycle Trail follows US Highway 26 through Grant County, en route

between Portland, Oregon and Virginia. Cyclists travel the highway in both directions, with access to unobstructed views of the landscape at slow speed.

d. Existing Environment/Condition for Visual Resources in the Watershed:

An expanded view, beyond the project area boundary, reveals a landscape that is generally characteristic of the forested mountains and grassy hills surrounding the John Day River valley. In this broader-scope landscape, the majority of private lands show evidence of past vegetative management, including selective timber harvest, clear cut areas, juniper cuts and clearing of trees and shrubs for agricultural purposes. The public lands of the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness (USFS) show visible effects of wildfire interspersed with unharvested forest areas. When viewing the public lands of LCM, the common observer is not likely to notice evidence of timber harvest activity. (Although some harvesting has occurred over the past few decades, it does not attract attention.) LCM, with no visible signs of vegetative management or wildfire, appears as an anomaly within the characteristic landscape.

e. Future Public or Private Management Actions:

Future management actions affecting visual resources are likely but unknown at this time.

f. Environmental Affects of No Management Action:

Direct Affects on Resource:

No direct affects to visual resources are expected.

Indirect Affects on Resource:

The indirect long-term (5-25 year) affects to visual resources of taking no management action include 1) a likely increase in insect-infested ponderosa pine on LCM, and 2) the possibility of a stand-replacing fire. If no action is taken to treat the current insect infestation, it would likely spread to additional ponderosa pine, resulting in an increase in dead and dying trees. As a tree is stressed due to insect infestation, the needles first take on a yellow tinge, then turn to a reddish-brown color as the tree dies. Next the needles fall from the tree, leaving a brown colored snag, until the bark falls from the tree, at which time the snag appears light grey in color. Eventually the snag falls to the ground.

It is difficult to predict how many trees would ultimately be infected if no action were taken to control the current insect infestation. The reddish-brown trees that are visible from KOPs # 1, 2 and 5 are already dead and will likely lose their needles within a year or two. Trees that are currently stressed by insects, but still living, are indicated by yellow-tinged needles. The yellow needles are not visible when observed from a distance, so it is not possible to detect the extent of the stressed trees from the KOPs. The current extent of stressed trees is approximately two to three times larger than extent of visible reddish-brown dead trees. If all of the stressed trees were to die, the total area of dead trees would be enlarged two to three times beyond the current area of visible dead trees. If new trees become infected by insects, they may also begin the dying cycle, further enlarging the area of dead trees.

The dead ponderosa pine (reddish-brown needles) visible from KOPs # 1, 2, and 5, occur in clusters or horizontal bands at various elevations of LCM. Where an infestation occurs in a stand dominated by ponderosa pine, an opening in the continuous texture of the forest canopy would eventually appear, introducing a new shape or form into the characteristic landscape. Where these openings occur at lower elevations or on flatter ground, they would be less visible. Where they occur on steep slopes or near ridgelines, the openings would be more noticeable. In areas of mixed tree species, the Douglas Fir would be unaffected by insects and would remain standing, creating visible spaces between trees, rather than openings. Where openings or spaces in the canopy occur, the ground color would be visible through the snags (a light green in spring, gold in summer and fall, and white of snow in winter) and a coarser vegetative texture would result. Spaces between trees and irregular openings in the forest would likely repeat the form color and texture currently visible in burn areas on the Canyon Mountain ridge, behind LCM. Openings on flatter terrain near the base of LCM would repeat the color and texture of the low hills visible in the foreground, where past vegetative management activities are evident. As open areas are created due to dead trees, new seedlings would grow in the openings, lessening the visual contrast of the openings over time. If no action were taken to control the current insect infestation, spaces between trees and dead tree openings would likely result in a weak to moderate degree of visual contrast in form, color and texture when compared with the characteristic landscape. The degree of contrast would be weak if the insect infestation did not expand beyond currently infected trees, and moderate if the extent of the insect infestation increased dramatically in the future.

The contrast in the characteristic landscape created as a result of dead tree openings would likely be noticeable from each of the five KOPs, to varying degrees. From KOP #1, only part of LCM is visible, and it not known whether openings would occur in the visible portion of the mountain. The openings would be the most visible from KOPs #2 and 5, in which the observer looks directly at the north face of LCM at fairly close range. From KOPs #3 and 4, the openings would be seen from a greater distance, but would still be visible. Openings located higher up the slope would be more noticeable.

If no action is taken to reduce the risk of a stand-replacing fire, the fire risk would remain high. If a stand-replacing fire were to occur, it would highly alter the characteristic landscape of LCM. Immediately after the fire, both the affects of the fire and the affects of fire suppression efforts would be visible. It is not known what vegetative species would grow on LCM after the fire, or how long re-growth would take. While it is not possible to describe the specific visual changes expected following a major wildfire, the changes would be expected to somewhat resemble those created by a previous fire on Canyon Mountain ridge within the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness. However, in the case of LCM, active efforts would be taken to suppress the fire. The combined visual effect of a stand-replacing fire and rigorous fire suppression efforts, including the potential use of dozer firebreaks along ridgelines, would likely result in a strong visual contrast in the elements of form, line, color and texture when compared with the characteristic landscape.

When considered together, taking no action to control insect infestations or to reduce the risk of stand-replacing fire would likely result in a strong degree of visual contrast in the elements of

form, line, color and texture over the long-term.

Brief Summary of Impacts of No Management Action:

If no action is taken to treat the current insect infestation, the insects would likely spread to additional trees, resulting in an increase in dead and dying trees. It is not possible to predict how widespread the tree damage would be. The resulting loss of canopy cover would create visible spaces and openings in the existing vegetative cover. The degree of visual contrast in the characteristic landscape created as a result of visible spaces and openings would likely be weak to moderate depending on the future extent of the insect infestation. If no action is taken to reduce the risk of a stand-replacing fire, the fire risk will remain high. If a stand-replacing fire were to occur and rigorous fire suppression tactics were employed, it would highly alter the characteristic landscape, likely creating a strong degree of visual contrast in the elements of form, line, color and texture. When considered together, the result of taking no action over the long-term would result in a strong visual contrast in all four elements, when compared with the characteristic landscape.

g. Comparison of Alternatives:

There are no visual resource actions proposed by the alternatives.

h. Environmental Affects of Management Alternatives:

Direct Affect on Resource:

(Note: The affects described in the following alternatives are long-term, expected to occur within 5 to 25 years following implementation. Short-term (less than 5 year) affects to visual resources would be expected to change continually throughout the implementation phase and were not analyzed, with the exception of the affects of smoke from slash burning.)

Alternative B:

Creating a fuel break up to 1,000 feet wide between BLM and private lands by thinning while leaving trees greater than 12 inches dbh, would likely result in little or no contrast in the existing characteristic landscape as viewed from the five KOPs. This is due to the small size of the area to be treated, the minor degree of thinning proposed (leaving trees greater than 12 inches dbh), and to treatment areas being partially-obscured from view.

The treatment area located at the base of LCM is partially obscured, to varying degrees from each of the KOPs, by low hills in the foreground. The treatment areas located at the base of LCM are adjacent to private lands, most of which have been altered with some sort of vegetative treatment, such as juniper cutting, selective harvest of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir, or total clearing of trees and shrubs for agricultural purposes. Minor thinning of public lands immediately adjacent to previously treated private lands would result in little contrast, because if the thinning is noticeable at all, it would blend in with the color and texture of the adjacent private lands. In addition, thinning on flatter terrain near the base of LCM would be less visible than thinning on steeper slopes. The treatment area located along the northwest ridge of Quartz Gulch would be visible from KOP # 4, however it would appear in the background, at too great a

distance to attract attention.

Creating a fuel break up to 1,000 feet wide between BLM and private lands would likely have little direct effect on visual resources. The degree of visual contrast to form, line, color and texture would be none to weak when compared with the characteristic landscape. Alternative B would meet Class II VRM objectives in all four elements.

In this alternative, no action would be taken to control the current insect infestation or reduce the risk of stand-replacing fire. If no action is taken to treat the current insect infestation, the infestation would likely spread to additional trees, resulting in an increase in dead and dying trees. The resulting loss of canopy cover would create visible spaces and openings in the existing vegetative cover, as described in the no action alternative. If no action is taken to reduce the risk of a stand-replacing fire, the fire risk will remain high. If a stand-replacing fire and rigorous fire suppression tactics were to occur, it would highly alter the characteristic landscape as described in the no action alternative.

Alternative C:

Thinning trees on 1300 acres identified as ‘non-traditional’ forest area to a maximum target basal area of 30-50 ft²/acre (42 ft. average tree spacing) and thinning trees on 924 acres identified as ‘traditional forest’ to a maximum target basal area of 60-100 ft²/acre (29 ft. average tree spacing) proposes a substantial change in basal area and tree spacing when compared with existing conditions. Changes in form, line, color and texture would occur, however, most of the changes would repeat the form, line, color and texture found in the characteristic landscape.

The potential exists for treatment areas with markedly different thinning rates to appear as new forms in the landscape, outlined by visible lines. However, the expected contrast in form and line would be greatly reduced with careful grading or feathering a wide swath around the perimeter of each treatment area, and decreasing the cutting rate along the northeast-southwest ridgeline.

The ‘non-traditional forest areas’, with the higher thinning rate, are primarily located at lower elevations along the base of the LCM. Here actions are less visible from the KOPs, and would tend to blend in with the adjacent private lands where previous vegetative treatments have taken place. Three ‘non-traditional’ treatment areas would be visible from the KOPs. Two of these are located in the upper elevations of LCM, however, the shapes or forms introduced by the treatment areas would closely repeat the form of the burned area openings on the Canyon Mountain ridge in the background. These two ‘non-traditional’ areas, while thinned at the higher of the two rates, would not likely appear out of place on LCM. The third ‘non-traditional’ treatment area occurs along the northeast ridgeline where it would be thinned at a reduced rate so as not to attract attention (see the prescription for ridgelines and skylines under actions common to all alternatives).

Following treatment, the ‘non-traditional’ treatment areas would appear as predominately light green, gold, or white (during winter), dotted with dark green trees, interspersed with heavily forested ‘traditional’ areas. While this would be a change in color and texture, the changes would repeat the color and texture provided in the characteristic landscape on Canyon Mountain

ridge, behind LCM.

Changes in form, line, color and texture would be expected in Alternative C however, the changes would repeat those found in the characteristic landscape, along Canyon Mountain ridge. With reduced thinning along the ridgeline, the degree of visual contrast expected between the alternative and the characteristic landscape would be weak in the elements of form, line, color and texture. Alternative C would meet Class II VRM objectives in all four elements.

Not treating the current insect infestation would also affect visual resources. If no action is taken to treat the current insect infestation, insects would likely spread to additional trees, resulting in an increase in dead and dying trees. The resulting loss of canopy cover would create visible spaces and openings in the existing vegetative cover as described in the no action alternative.

Alternative D:

Uniform thinning of the entire treatment area at a maximum target basal area of 40-60 ft²/acre (38 ft. average tree spacing) would likely attract the attention of the common observer, especially on slopes over 35% where changes in tree spacing would stand out compared with existing conditions. The proposed cutting rate would not likely attract attention in flat or gently sloping terrain, but the same cutting rate would become increasingly noticeable where the slope increases. In flat terrain, the viewer sees many “layers” of trees at the same time, which blend together to form a forest. As slope increases, the viewer sees fewer and fewer “layers” of trees, until only one “layer” of trees may be visible against the hillside, causing light green, gold, or white spaces to appear between trees.

The treatment area would be highly visible from all 5 KOPs, however, the riparian treatment area in Little Pine Creek and the road upgrade and re-routing would not be visible from the KOPs.

Uniform thinning over the entire mountain would maintain the solid triangular form of the existing vegetation. There would be no large openings or variations in thinning rates to attract the attention of the observer. Although new lines would be introduced at BLM/private property boundaries due to an abrupt change in tree density, these lines would be primarily located at the base of the mountain and most are obscured from the KOPs by low hills. The continuity of the strong existing northeast-southwest ridgeline would be maintained by incorporating reduced thinning rates along the ridgeline, resulting in a weak contrast in the element of line.

In this alternative, the strongest degree of contrast would result from the change in vegetative color and texture. On slopes over 35%, the solid dark green color of the existing forest would appear as predominately light green, gold, or white (during winter), dotted with dark green trees, creating a moderate degree of contrast in vegetative color. The continuous texture of the LCM forest canopy would appear much more coarse on steeper slopes, resulting in a moderate contrast in texture. Although Canyon Mountain ridge, behind LCM, provides variety in color and texture in the characteristic landscape, the variety would not be repeated in this alternative. Instead, a uniform cutting rate would appear unnatural and thus attract attention.

Not treating the current insect infestation would also affect visual resources. If no action is taken to treat the current insect infestation, insects would likely spread to additional trees, resulting in

an increase in dead and dying trees. The resulting loss of canopy cover would create visible spaces and openings in the existing vegetative cover as described in the no action alternative.

Uniform thinning of all public lands on LCM at the proposed rate would result in a weak degree of contrast in the element of form and line and a moderate degree of contrast in the elements of color and texture, when compared with the characteristic landscape of LCM. This alternative would meet Class II VRM objectives for form and line, but would not meet Class II VRM objectives for color and texture.

To further reduce the degree of visual contrast expected in the elements of color and texture, the maximum target basal area could be increased to 70-90 ft²/acre in areas above 35% slope (where visibility increases). This reduction in thinning rates would reduce visible gaps in the forest canopy, which attract attention due to changes in vegetative color and texture. These additional mitigations would be expected to reduce the visual contrast between Alternative D and the characteristic landscape to weak in all four elements. Alternative D, as mitigated above, would meet Class II VRM objectives.

Alternative E:

Thinning the entire treatment area at a target basal rate that would gradually increase from 40-50 ft²/acre (40 ft. average tree spacing) at the base of LCM to 90-100 ft²/acre (28 ft. average tree spacing) would maintain the solid triangular form of the existing vegetation, assuming the incorporation of visual screening and dead-tree retention in treatments of insect-infested areas. Variations in thinning rates would be gradual and unlikely to attract the attention of the common observer. Although new lines may be visible at BLM/private property boundaries due to an abrupt change in tree density, these boundaries are primarily located at the base of the mountain and some areas most are obscured from the KOPs by low hills. Thinning at the upper elevation ridgelines and skylines would be at the lowest of the four rates, providing more tree cover in these visually sensitive areas. Spaces between trees would appear light green, gold, or white (during winter), but would repeat the color contrast visible in the Canyon Mountain ridge. The solid texture of the existing forest would appear more coarse but again would repeat the variety of textures visible in Canyon Mountain ridge.

Graded thinning over the entire mountain would result in a weak degree of contrast in the elements of form, line, color and texture when compared with the existing characteristic landscape. Alternative E would meet Class II VRM objectives in all four elements.

Alternative F:

Thinning the public lands according to specific prescriptions based on species composition would be expected to attract the attention of the common observer where ponderosa and mixed conifer stands are found on slopes greater than 35%. Thinning western juniper dominated stands to a maximum target basal area of 0-40 ft²/acre (42 ft. average tree spacing), ponderosa pine dominated stands to 40-60 ft²/acre (38 ft. average tree spacing), mixed conifer dominated stands to 60-80 ft²/acre (31 ft. average tree spacing) and Douglas fir dominated stands to 80-100 ft²/acre (28 ft. average tree spacing) proposes a sizeable change in basal area and tree spacing compared with existing conditions.

The potential exists for treatment areas with different thinning rates to appear as new forms in the landscape with noticeable outlines. However, carefully grading or feathering the perimeter of treatment areas, straight lines and right angles, reducing thinning rates on the northeast-southwest ridgeline, and incorporating visual screening and dead-tree retention in insect-infested areas would result in a weak contrast in the element of line.

The solid dark green color of the existing forest would appear as predominately gold, or white (during winter), dotted with dark green trees. This contrast in color would be particularly noticeable where insect-infested trees were removed, and in ponderosa pine and mixed conifer stands above 35% slope where heavier thinning would be more noticeable. The uniform texture of the existing forest would change to an uneven coarser texture caused by the many changes in thinning rates, appearing particularly sparse in ponderosa pine and mixed conifer stands on steep slopes.

The degree of visual contrast expected between this alternative and the existing landscape, would be weak in the elements of form, line, color and texture. Alternative F would meet Class II VRM objectives in all four elements.

Indirect Affects on Resource:

Alternative B would have the same indirect effects on visual resources as those described in the no action alternative, since the effects of uncontrolled insect infestations and the risk of stand-replacing fire would remain the same.

In Alternatives B through F, burning of slash piles and prescribed burning may create smoke that temporarily hampers the visual quality in the surrounding area, including within the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness Area.

Perimeter of treatment areas:

To meet BLM's Class II Visual Resource Management objectives, the project would be designed to reduce the introduction of new shapes, forms, or lines on LCM. Treatment area perimeters would be carefully blended or feathered, by gradually moving from one thinning rate to another. Treatment area perimeters would be curved with rounded corners, to mimic natural lines in the landscape. Long straight sections and sharp corners would be avoided.

Ridgelines and skylines:

To meet BLM's Class II Visual Resource Management objectives, thinning on ridgelines and skylines would be approached with utmost caution, as these lines attract the eye of the observer. To protect the visual quality of the highly visible northeast-southwest ridgeline, thinning rates would be reduced along the ridge. The goal would be to maintain the appearance of an unbroken line of trees, especially along the southwest portion of the ridge, where individual trees are silhouetted against the skyline, when viewed from the KOPs.

Insect infested areas:

To minimize affects on visual quality, healthy trees growing immediately below (in elevation) insect-infested areas would be retained, regardless of species, to provide a screen or visual

barrier to an observer located below or level with the infested area. Wherever possible, the perimeter of insect treatment areas would be blended or feathered to lessen the appearance of a hole in the forest canopy (see perimeter of treatment areas, above). Gradual thinning from the edges toward the center of the infested area is preferable. Dead trees that no longer pose a threat to healthy trees would be left standing, to provide some variety in color and texture in the insect treatment areas.

Logging methods:

Full suspension of logs would be used on slopes greater than 35 percent to minimize visible soil disturbance caused by tree removal, specifically evidence of drag lines on steep slopes.

Burning:

Refraining from burning slash piles when a stagnant air advisory has been issued by the National Weather Service, would reduce the incidence of poor visual quality caused by smoke.

Brief Summary of Impacts of Alternatives:

Each of the alternatives would have some effect on visual resources. Alternative B would have the least direct effects on visual resources, but would have the same indirect effects as those described in the no action alternative, since the effects of uncontrolled insect infestations and the risk of stand-replacing fire would remain the same. Alternatives B, C, E and F would meet Class II VRM objectives. Alternative D could be mitigated to meet Class II VRM objectives.

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