

SIGNAL TREE THINNING
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA# OR105-97-10
Decision Documentation

Bureau of Land Management-Roseburg District
South River Resource Area
Date Prepared: October 23, 1997

Decision:

This is a decision on the Signal Tree portion of Environmental Assessment (EA) # OR105-97-10 of which the Burma Thinning analysis is also included. I authorize the harvest of 2.0 MMBF of timber in a commercial thinning from approximately 150 acres in T29S R9W Section 35 and T30S R9W Section 3. This decision coincides with Alternative #1 in the Environmental Assessment. The harvest is located in the Matrix land allocation. The sale date for Smoke Signal (contract name) is November 25, 1997.

All units will be thinned from below with the objective of maintaining a stand density of 80-110 trees per acre. Units 35A and 3A (Units 1 and 2, respectively, in the contract) will be ground based harvested in the dry season. There will be approximately 1.3 miles of temporary road construction of which all but 0.2 miles is on existing roads which were used when the area was originally harvested. These roads will be fully decommissioned after use during the same dry season.

In addition to the identified Best Management Practices (BMP) and project design features inherent in this action (as identified in the Environmental Assessment), I adopt the following mitigation:

- 1.) No felling, bucking or yarding activities will occur between April 15 and July 15.
- 2.) Provide for uneven leave tree spacing, no-cut islands, small openings, and residual late seral habitat components such as large diameter trees, down logs and snags.
- 3.) Implement measures to prevent disturbance of Special Status Plants, including directional falling, maintaining existing coarse woody debris, using designated skid roads where possible, and leaving untreated (unthinned) areas around plant populations.
- 4.) In areas where the Port Orford cedar root disease (*Phytophthora lateralis*) is present, restrict operations to the dry season. Prior to initial move-in, and any time logging equipment is removed from the contract area during the duration of the contract, and returned, it will be steam cleaned or pressure washed to remove potentially contaminated soil. Sequential harvesting of the units will be scheduled.

I have decided to not adopt the mitigation to: till (prior to harvest) all natural surface roads (including skid trails and jeep roads) not needed for harvest and not currently functioning as commercial timberland. The rationale is that, due to previous tractor entry, there are a number of existing trails, and the majority of them will again be used in conjunction with this action and tilled after use. There are limited opportunities to implement this mitigation in a practicable manner. Previous ground based management activities have caused an estimated 4.5% productivity loss. The tillage of the skid trails after use, will reduce this loss to approximately 1.8%, which is a 60% recovery in productivity.

Rationale for Decision:

The decision is based on the following objectives; Alternative 1 applies the ecosystem management approach as outlined in the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (ROD) and meets the objectives for Matrix lands as stated in the Roseburg District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP, p. 33). The sales will contribute to the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) (ROD/RMP, p. 60) for the resource area as originally proposed. The no action alternative would not meet the above objectives nor would it benefit the health of the stands in this watershed. The project would also meet the Director's overall objective for "Maintaining Healthy Ecosystems."

Additional rationale includes:

- The thinning would result in minimal loss of functionality for dispersal habitat in the short term and would benefit the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) in the long term.
- The thinning is outside any known NSO territory and there would be no direct impacts to any known site.
- The action would conform with the Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion (BO) received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, dated June 16, 1997.
- The action is outside of known territories, habitat zones or suitable habitat for bald eagle, marbled murrelet, peregrine falcon and Columbian white-tailed deer.
- The action would not appreciably reduce the survival of the Oregon Coast steelhead, thus the species would not be jeopardized. A concurrence letter for formal conferencing with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) dated July 16, 1997 has been received by BLM.
- There are no cultural resources in the sale area. SHPO concurrence has been received.
- The thinning is in conformance with Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives and the Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) in the ROD.

Additional mitigation will be implemented to:

- 1.) Avoid damage to leave trees.
- 2.) Result in minimal loss of functionality for dispersal habitat in the short term and have net benefit for owls and other late seral species in the long term.
- 3.) Protect Special Status Plant species.
- 4.) Conform with Port-Orford Cedar Management Guidelines, and avoid running contaminated equipment over disease-free areas.

No issues were identified by other agencies or Native Americans during the scoping process. Comments were received from one member of the public and were considered during the development of this decision. None of the comments provided new information or issues which have not been addressed in the EA or EIS. Two comments received, warrant clarification:

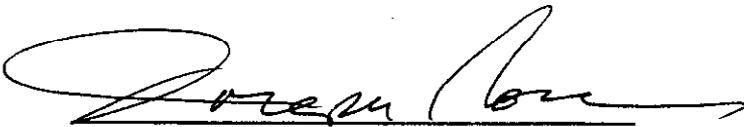
1. Although the commercial thinning lies within the range of the marbled murrelet, there is no suitable habitat within 1/4 mile of the sale units.
2. The federal forest lands in the Middle Coquille watershed currently comprise 43% late-successional forest. There will be no change as a result of this action.

Compliance and Monitoring:

Monitoring will be conducted as per the guidance given in the ROD/RMP (Appendix I).

Protest and Appeal Procedures:

As outlined in 43 CFR Subpart 5003 Administrative Remedies, protests may be filed with the authorized officer within 15 days of the first publication date of the sale notice in the News Review.



for
Alan Wood
Area Manager & Authorized Officer
South River Resource Area

10/22/97
Date