

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SALEM DISTRICT OFFICE

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT
AND DECISION RATIONALE**

**FLAT PEAK MOUNTAIN THINNING
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT No. OR080-00-03**

I have reviewed the proposal and alternatives for the accomplishment of the *Flat Peak Mountain Thinning*, a portion of the Fiscal Year 2001 timber sale program for the Marys Peak Resource Area. The affected environment, proposed action and potential environmental consequences of the timber sale and associated activities are described in the *Flat Peak Thinning Environmental Assessment* dated April 10, 2001, an EA amendment dated April 10, 2001, and the attached EA amendment. The EA and Finding of No Significant Impact and EA amendment were made available for public review from April 13 to May 14, 2001.

Programmatic documents covering this proposal are the:

Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (S&M ROD, January 2001) and the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement For Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (S&M FSEIS, November 2000).

Salem District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP, May, 1995)

Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (ROD, April, 1994)

Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (SEIS, February, 1994)

Western Oregon Program-Management of Competing Vegetation Final Environmental Impact Statement (VMFEIS, February 1989) and the Western Oregon Program-Management of Competing Vegetation Record of Decision (August 1992).

The Environmental Assessment (EA) and this FONSI are tiered with the mentioned environmental documents. All of these documents may be reviewed at the Salem District office.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT

This document supplements the EA and EA Amendment dated April 10, 2001 for the *Flat Peak Mountain Thinning* by describing the changes in proposed action, affected environment, and environmental consequences.

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

D. Summary of Alternatives

1. Alternative A: Proposed Action

Unit 25a (Contract Unit No. 1)

Total unit acreage would change from 155 acres to approximately 131 acres which would be apportioned as follows:

Commercial Thinning (matrix)	78 acres
Density Management (Riparian Reserves)	46 acres
Road Right of Way	7 acres

Unit 25b (Contract Unit No. 2)

Total unit acreage would change from 17 acres to approximately 10 acres which would be apportioned as follows:

Commercial Thinning (matrix)	8 acres
Special Marks	2 acres

Unit 25c (Contract Unit No. 3)

Total unit acreage would change from 6 acres to approximately 5.5 acres which would be apportioned as follows:

Commercial Thinning (matrix)	3 acres
Density Management (Riparian Reserves)	1 acre
Road Right of Way	1 acre
Special Marks	.5 acre

Page 9 of the EA, under **iii. Road and Landing Construction, Road Management** the word “may” under bullet six is replaced with “would” in order to provide consistency with the fish biological assessment. The word “blocked” is eliminated.

III. DESCRIPTION OF AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

All references to “blocking” or “blocked” will be replaced with decommissioning or decommissioned.

The word “Conferencing” second sentence under EA page 45, Listed Fish Species is replaced with “Consultation”. In addition the following language is added to the EA page 46 under Listed Fish Species:

The Level 1 Team which assesses potential impacts to listed fish determined that the proposed project is a “May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect” Oregon coast coho salmon. The Biological Assessment (BA) which assessed potential impacts to listed fish in the Oregon Coast Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU) was submitted to NMFS in May 2001. A Letter of Concurrence dated January 16, 2002 concluded that “the proposed commercial thinning and density management actions are not likely to adversely affect OC coho salmon”.

The following language is added to the EA page 46 under **Northern Spotted Owl (*strix occidentalis*)**:

There are 524 acres of 55-60 year old owl dispersal habitat in the Flat Pk Matrix stand (section 25). The proposed action would thin 142 acres, leaving 382 acres of untreated dispersal habitat. This stand connects to unsuitable habitat on private land on all four sides and to more BLM Matrix dispersal habitat at all four corners. The thinning would not impact the ability of the stand to continue to function as dispersal habitat. Fifteen years of owl survey and monitoring efforts have shown occasional movement (four owls) in a south-north direction in the vicinity of the stand. The thinning would have no affect on the ability of an owl to utilize the 524 acres of dispersal habitat in the section.

The following language is added to the EA page 46 under **Marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)**

The proposal would have no affect on murrelet habitat because this is Matrix land. The trees proposed to be thinned in Unit 25C are over 200 feet away from the closest remnant late successional tree and provide no protection to the remnant trees or to the nesting structure in the remnants due to their location, their size, and the small size of the unit (less than 6 acres).

V. Consultation

The EA and EA amendment were mailed to approximately 12 agencies, individuals, and organizations on April 11, 2001. A legal notice soliciting public input on the action was placed in the Corvallis Gazette Times on April 13, 2001. One comment letter from an environmental organization and one e-mail from the US Fish and Wildlife Service were received. The following summarizes the substantive comments raised in both the letter and the e-mail and responds where appropriate:

Oregon Natural Resources Council (received May 16, 2001)

Snags and Cavity Dependent Species

- 1) *The EA does not adequately address the need to protect and provide snag habitat. The EA must at least disclose how many large snags will be protected vs felled for safety under the preferred alternative.(proposed action)*

No large snags will be protected vs felled for safety under the proposed action. As stated on page 49 of the EA under **Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat** “The stands have an adequate amount of hard (Class 1 and 2) snags and some hard coarse woody (CWD) but they are all in the smaller diameter classes.” This statement is confirmed by the fact that the Mary’s Peak Resource Area cruiser recently inspected all portions of the proposed harvest area and found that all snags present are small size (5 to 12) inches in diameter as they were previously suppressed trees. The proposed action would shorten the time necessary for development of large snags. As stated on p.49 of the EA under **Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat** that “Management could abbreviate the recruitment time necessary for the development of larger (greater than 20”) hard snags”.

No Roadbuilding Please

- 2) *Nothing is worse for sensitive wildlife than a road.*

As displayed in **Appendix A-3: Project Design Features Table Flat Peak Mtn Timber Sale - Proposed Action** all newly constructed roads will be decommissioned (Approximately 7300 feet). In addition, approximately 5100 feet of existing roads will be decommissioned. The impacts of roads on wildlife as a result of this sale will be reduced in the long run due to the fact that after implementation there would approximately 1 mile of road less in the area than before the proposed action is implemented.

Weeds

- 3) *The invasive weed sites in the analysis area and along all log and gravel haul routes should be fully inventoried and documented as part of the NEPA process for this project area. In the absence of valid and complete weed survey information, harvest and road and fuel treatment activities planned as part of this project might exacerbate the problem instead of contain it.*

The project area was surveyed several times for both noxious weeds and survey and manage species. A list of noxious weeds which are either present or adjacent the project area are listed on pages 18 and 19 of the EA. As discussed on page 21 of the EA, with implementation of project design features “adverse effects from noxious weeds are not anticipated.”

SOILS CONCERNS

- 4) *Soil productivity must be zealously guarded in order to protect our forests for future*

generations. The existing level of soil disturbance has not been measured and disclosed so the Agency cannot say with any factual basis whether forest plan standards will be met.

The second sentence is completely inaccurate. The project area was surveyed for the existing level of soil disturbance and the results were disclosed in the EA on page 23 2nd paragraph first sentence, “There is evidence of old tractor skid roads scattered through out the project area probably dating back to the original tractor logging of the sites in the 1940's” The EA on page 46 second paragraph discloses our estimate of predicted disturbance/compaction, “Following completion of the project, the most impact possible would be approximately 10 percent of total acreage with some level of unmitigated soil compaction / disturbance”. The author provides no evidence that our estimation of total soil disturbance/compaction following harvest is inaccurate. Our estimation of soil disturbance/compaction following harvest is completely within Salem District RMP guidelines (Appendix B-3, Salem District RMP -“Use designated skid roads to limit areal extent of skid roads plus landings to less than 10 percent of the unit”)

US Fish and Wildlife Service (received May 14, 2001)

Decommissioning vs blocking

- 1) *I find it confusing the number of miles of road which will be decommissioned versus blocked.*

We agree that in the original EA the terms “decommissioning” and “blocking” were used synonymously and this could be confusing. To eliminate this confusion we have amended section **III** (EA Amendment, page 3) to correct this confusion. Although the EA does not specifically address whether the decommission definition matches what the ROD B-31 says, bullets 6 and 7 on page 9 of the EA, under **iii. Road and Landing Construction, Road Management**, fully discloses decommissioning design features.

EA page 45/ Listed Fish Species

- 2) *Also when the document indicates conferencing, is that for cutthroat (I assume)?*

Our reference to conferencing should be consultation. The correct terminology is used under item number 7 of the FONSI.

EA page 46/ Special Status Species

- 3) *In this case I do not see any clear evidence to support a “no effect” call for northern spotted owl habitat.*

On page 3 of the attached EA Amendment, which references EA page 46 under **Northern Spotted Owl (*strix occidentalis*)** we explain our rationale for the "no effect" call for northern spotted owl habitat.

EA page 46/ Marbled Murrelet

4/ *I am a little uneasy about the call for murrelet habitat (not being habitat) based on the information provided.*

On page 3 of the attached EA Amendment, which references EA page 46 under **Marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*)** we explain the rationale for the call regarding murrelet habitat.

Prepared by: P. B. Gidding Date: 1-23-02

DECISION RATIONALE

My decision is to do the following:

Implement the proposed action as amended and incorporate Alternative 1 under Additional Mitigation Opportunity which would change the approximate start date for ground-based yarding from August 1 to July 15.

Approximately 78 percent (112 acres) of the proposed harvest area has been proposed for ground based yarding. Currently, with 2.5 months available for ground based yarding, adding the additional 2 weeks would increase the ability of the timber sale purchaser to complete this sale in one season. Adding this time period would coincide with the end of the yarding restriction for low sap flow and may positively increase the bid price of the timber.

No measurable changes in impacts to soil resources were identified through the interdisciplinary team process for this mitigation measure change.

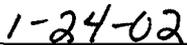
Based on the information in the Environmental Assessment and EA Amendments for the Flat Peak Mountain Thinning, it is my determination that the new information does not change my original Finding of No Significant Impact Determination dated April 10, 2001. Impacts to the environment would not be significantly more than those disclosed in the original EA. Since the Finding of No Significant Impact Determination is still valid, a new FEIS or supplement to the existing FEIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared.

Protests

In accordance with forest management regulations at 43 CFR 5003.2, the decision for this timber sale will not become effective or be open to formal protest until the Notice of Sale is published "in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located." Protests of the sale must be filed within 15 days of the first publication of the notice. For this project, the Notice of Sale will be first published in the *Corvallis Gazette-Times* on or before February 1, 2002. The planned sale date is February 27, 2002.



Cindy Enstrom
Marys Peak Field Manager



Date