

FINAL DECISION DOCUMENTATION and DECISION RATIONALE

**Old Blue Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Project**

Environmental Assessment Number OR080-01-04

USDI - Bureau of Land Management  
Oregon State Office, Salem District, Marys Peak Resource Area

Sections 5 and 7, Township 13 South, Range 7 West Willamette Meridian

Benton County, Oregon

I. BACKGROUND

Starting in 1999 and through 2002 an IDT (interdisciplinary team) analyzed approximately 150 acres managed by the Marys Peak Resource Area, Salem District, BLM (Bureau of Land Management) for a timber harvest proposal. These stands analyzed are located within the North Fork Alsea River Watershed. An environmental analysis was conducted and documented in the Old Blue Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Project Environmental Assessment (EA) Number OR080-01-04. Approximately 22 acres were dropped from further analysis at various stages in the process. The EA documented a proposal to perform density management harvest on approximately 128 acres within Late Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations (LUA). The proposed action also included felling trees to create Class 1 coarse woody debris (CWD) in the uplands and Riparian Reserve, and increasing diameter growth to achieve future potential coarse woody debris and instream large wood sources. Temporary road construction, road renovation, and road decommissioning were also part of the proposal. A Finding of No Significant Impact was signed on February 4, 2003 and the EA and FONSI were made available for public review on February 10, 2003.

Since the release of the EA, the IDT has identified the need to update some information after further field reconnaissance. Changes relating to road renovation are described in the following section, which also describes any changes to the analysis and determination of effects as presented in the February 4, 2003 EA.

## II. MODIFICATIONS TO THE PROPOSED ACTION / CHANGES TO AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

### 1. Changes to the Project Design Features/Mitigation Measures

- a. Approximately 600 feet of existing road (13-7-18) would include curve alignment and grade reduction. An approximate 15 foot extension to an existing 36 inch diameter culvert would be installed and approximately 4 feet of additional embankment height would be placed upon it. Within the stream protection zone of the stream, approximately 3 conifers greater than 14 inches (diameter breast height outside bark) DBHOB would be cut and left on site. In-stream work would generally be conducted between July 1 and August 31, the period recommended by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- b. All design features and mitigation measures are incorporated into the timber sale contract.

No measurable changes to the Environmental Consequences

## III. DECISION

Based on site-specific analysis in the Environmental Assessment, the supporting project record, management recommendations contained in the Watershed Analysis (North Fork Alsea River) dated July, 1996, as well as the management direction contained in the RMP (*Salem District Resource Management Plan*), dated May, 1995, I have decided to implement the Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) described in the Old Blue Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Project Environmental Assessment (EA # OR080-01-04) (EA pp. 7-16, with the modifications in Section II -1 and 2, above, hereafter referred to as the “selected action ” (see attached map).

The following is a summary of this decision.

1. Harvest approximately 128 acres from Late Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve Land Use Allocations for an expected yield of 3,600 hundred cubic feet (CCF) ( 2000 MBF). The following is a description of harvest acres and timber volumes by harvest method.
  - a. Density management (Partial Cut) of approximately 128 acres of Late Successional Reserve and Riparian Reserve lands from 5 units.
2. Road Renovation (brushing, blading, spot rocking, curve realignment, culvert extension, minimal excavation) would occur on approximately 14,000 feet of existing road.

3. Road Decommissioning & Blocking: Approximately 7,600 feet of existing roads would be decommissioned. Approximately 502 feet of road to be constructed would be decommissioned after completion of logging operations. The decommissioned roads would also be blocked.
4. Late Successional and Riparian Reserve Enhancement: Conifer coarse woody debris will be created within the Late Successional and Riparian Reserves by retaining on site any residual trees incidentally felled to facilitate access and operability that are greater than 20 inches DBHOB and trees less than 20 inches DBHOB could be removed if a minimum of 2 trees per acre are retained as down logs.
5. Compliance with Direction

The selected action is consistent with applicable land use plans, policies, and programs

- a. Programmatic documents covering this proposal are the:

*Record of Decision for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and Other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (ROD, January, 2001). Salem District Resource Management Plan (May 1995), Record of Decision (ROD) for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 1994), Western Oregon Program-Management of Competing Vegetation Record of Decision (August 1992). Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program Final EIS (USDI, 1985) and the associated Record of Decision (USDI, April 7, 1986), and the Supplement to the Northwest Area Noxious Weed Control Program (USDI, March 1987) and the its associated Record of Decision (May 5, 1987).*

All of these documents may be reviewed at the Marys Peak Resource Area office.

- b. Monitoring activities related to this sale will be done as described in Appendix J of the RMP (May, 1995).

#### IV. DECISION RATIONALE

Considering public comment, the content of the EA and supporting project record, the management recommendations contained in the North Fork Alsea River Watershed Analysis, and the management direction contained in the RMP, I have decided to implement the selected action as described above. My rationale for this decision follows: The selected action addresses the identified purpose and need for action in that it will:

- a. Enhance late-successional forest characteristics in relatively uniform dense conifer stands by density management.
- b. Create terrestrial large down wood. Increase diameter growth to achieve future potential coarse woody debris and instream large wood sources.
- c. Decommission roads to improve long term hydrologic recovery.

Alternative 2 – “Reduced Road Decommissioning Distance”, Alternative 3, the “No Action” alternative, , and alternatives, which were considered but eliminated from further consideration during the development of the proposed action, would not satisfactorily fulfill the Purpose and Need for action, EA p. 1.

## V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/ CONSULTATION/COORDINATION

### 1. Scoping

A description of the proposal was included in the Salem Bureau of Land Management *Project Update* which is mailed to more than 900 individuals and organizations four times each year. A letter asking for scoping input on the proposal was mailed on April 17, 2002 to adjacent landowners and individuals who have expressed an interest in management activities in the resource area as a whole or in this drainage. Letters were also sent to the Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde; Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians; Federal, State, County and local government organizations; and Special Interest groups.

### 2. Comment Period and Comments

The EA was mailed to approximately 5 agencies, individuals and organizations on February 4, 2003. A legal notice was placed in local newspapers soliciting public input on the action from February 10, 2003 to March 11, 2003. One comment letter was received:

Responses to these comments can be found in the *Response to Public Comments Received on the Old Blue Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Project* in the Old Blue project file and are also attached as an appendix to this Decision Record.

### 3. Consultation/Coordination

The Old Blue timber sale was submitted for Informal Consultation with U.S. Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fish), as provided in Section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Magnuson-Stevens Act section 305 (b)(2). NOAA Fish concurred with BLM's determination that the Old Blue project "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" Oregon coast coho salmon.

The Old Blue timber sale was submitted for Formal Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as provided in Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16U.S.C. 1536 (a)(2) and (a)(4) as amended). Consultation was completed on September 30, 2002 (Reference number 1-7-02-F-958). As a result of consultation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that the sale would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl or marbled murrelet.

## VI. CONCLUSION

I have determined that change to the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI - February 2003) for the Old Blue Timber Sale is not necessary for these reasons:

The existing EA for the Old Blue Timber Sale, along with additional information contained in this document, fully covers the project. There are no significant new circumstances or facts relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the modification to the proposed action or its impacts, which were not addressed in the EA. The action is within the scope of the alternatives identified in the original EA, and the environmental impacts are within those described in the original EA and are less than or the same as those anticipated for the proposed action in that assessment.

### 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 this sale must be filed within 15 days of the first publication of the notice. For this project, the Notice of Sale will be published in the *Corvallis Gazette Times* on or around August 22, 2003. The planned sale date is September 24, 2003.

## Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the BLM protest process, contact Gary Humbard (503) 315-5981, or Carolyn Sands (503) 315-5973, Marys Peak Resource Area, Salem BLM, 1717 Fabry SE, Salem, Oregon 97306.

Approved by: Niane Ymuis - Acting F.Mgr. 4/16/03  
Cindy Enstrom Date  
Marys Peak Resource Area Field Manager

## Appendix C

### ***Response to Public Comments Received on the Old Blue Late Successional Reserve Enhancement Project***

The following are comments that the BLM received from the public after public review of the Environmental Analysis (EA). The comments, (in *italics* type), may have been paraphrased for clarity or conciseness, but the complete text of the comment was available to the IDT making the response. The full text of the comment letter is available in the Old Blue EA file. The IDT response is in normal type.

#### **Commenter: Oregon Natural Resources Council**

##### *Failure to analyze impacts to white-footed voles*

While white-footed voles are indeed a very rare species that little is known about, they are not currently a special status species covered by BLM policy, nor are they a Survey and Manage Species. This elusive vole species has been categorized as a Tracking Species under current policy (see link below). While BLM is obligated to avoid contributing to the need to list any wildlife species, we are not obligated to survey for this species, nor evaluate impacts within this NEPA document. Yet, on page 48 of the EA, a rationale is provided for why species like this vole are not likely to be substantially affected by this proposed action, so as to contribute to their decline or elevate their status for concern. The reasons outlined that could apply to this vole include: “..existing corridors for movement through Riparian Reserves would not be diminished”, and; “..any species of concern that may occur within the project area either do not make significant use of this habitat type or their use of this habitat is dependent on structural components (canopy closure, hardwoods, snags and down logs, existing stick nests) that would not be substantially diminished within the local landscape”

Link to BLM Special Status Species Policy:

[http://www.or.blm.gov/Resources/Special-Status\\_Species/IM\\_OR\\_2003-054.htm](http://www.or.blm.gov/Resources/Special-Status_Species/IM_OR_2003-054.htm)

*BLM should purposely plan for future snags and down logs.*

The interdisciplinary team designed a plan for managing coarse woody debris on Page 10 of the EA (outlined in Table 2 on that same page).

*Trees cut for operability should be left on site, leaving two trees per acre is unacceptable.*

To implement this project we must provide for reasonably efficient harvest and yarding operations. We believe that leaving two trees per acre (felled green trees) is a sufficient target number to be achieved at the end of harvest operations. In addition to these felled green trees, the treatment units will also have standing hard or soft snags along with existing down logs that are merchantable and not merchantable. As described in the EA on page 11, our goal is to create up to 8 trees per acre on some units and take up to 5 years to reach this goal. Our experience in this watershed on slopes with these aspects is that wind-throw that typically occurs within two years following harvest operation comes close to reaching the target numbers. If our monitoring efforts after 5 years indicates that we haven't reached our target numbers, this EA provides the option to create more CWD at that time.

*The EA does not say whether thinning will be uniform or variable.*

The EA does not explicitly state that thinning would be variable, however variable spacing is a primary objective in this project. The silviculture prescription (available in the NEPA file) indicates this objective in several places (pp. 3 13-15). Table 1 on page 8 of the EA indicates that three units (7B, 7C, and 5A) would be thinned using a diameter limit, which leads to variable spacing, due to random distribution of tree diameters and since the diameters of the trees themselves dictate whether they will be left or cut, regardless of their horizontal position in the stand. Variability of residual tree density is expected to produce small openings, gaps, clumps or patches of low density as indicated by the prescription verification plots in Appendix E of the Silviculture report. Two units (7A and 7D) would be thinned based on basal area retention, calling for a wide basal area range over each unit, with the objective of creating and/or maintaining variable spacing.

*The plan for 1/4 to 1 acre openings should be 1/4 to 1/2 acres and they should be heavy thinnings, not miniclearcuts.*

One goal of the proposed project is to create structural complexity which includes creating small early seral openings combined with other areas of denser stocking within the context of a relatively large thinning area. This patchiness creates habitat for a larger variety and number of species than any one of the treatments would alone. In addition, creating an opening as large as an acre allows enough light for understory conifers to grow. These openings within a thinning area, combined with areas of denser than average or untreated stocking, are well supported in the latest research (Carey, A.B., D.R Thysell and A.W. Brodie. 1999c *The Forest Ecosystem Study: Background, Rationale, Implementation, Baseline Conditions, and Silvicultural Assessment*. U.S.D.A. Forest Service Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-457, Portland, OR. [http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/gtr\\_457.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/gtr_457.pdf)).

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Additionally, the *Late-Successional Reserve Assessment Oregon Coast Province-Southern Portion (RO267, RO269)* (June 1997) allows for creation of openings “...generally less than 1 acre in size...”, which we interpret to mean as large as 1 acre or less.

Our method for creating horizontal complexity in this project was to use a combination of diameter cut limit and basal area retention requirements, generally without regard for spacing. Because of the stocking and diameters within this particular project, openings larger than 1 acre and devoid of trees would not be created.

*We are concerned that Doug-fir may have a diameter growth advantage over the hemlock and alder and that use of a uniform diameter limit will favor Douglas-fir over the hemlock and alder.*

Our objective in all units is to maintain species diversity. As shown in Table 1 on page 8 of the EA, the thinning prescriptions do not remove any species from the mix. We changed some proportions of species (for example, in unit 7A we attempted to even out the percent of Douglas-fir and western hemlock, and in 7D we attempted to increase the percentage of western hemlock), all based on site specific analyses of stocking densities and species. Over the long term, whether we treat the stands or not, Douglas-fir will indeed have a height growth and longevity advantage over the red alder, but for now, alder will remain a component in the stand. The Douglas-fir, particularly in unit 7C, is generally already larger (diameter and height) than the western hemlock, therefore we think that the proposed thinning will actually enhance species diversity, by creating more growing space for the retained western hemlock. The forest stand information we collected and analyzed using Oregon Growth Analysis and Projection System (Organon , v.1.3) to develop the prescriptions indicate that all species remain in the stands for the foreseeable future. Western hemlock and alder would not be eliminated from any stand by the proposed action.

*Page 22 of the EA implies that all hardwoods would be retained, when in fact alder diversity would be reduced.*

Page 22 of the EA states “design features to retain hardwood species, would retain species diversity.” The EA does not state or even imply that all hardwoods would be retained. Only a few smaller diameter alders (no other hardwood species) are proposed to be cut. As Table 1, page 8 of the EA indicates, percent alder in unit 7C would decrease by 1 percent after treatment and percent alder in unit 5A would increase by 2 percent. We do not think this significantly decreases either alder or overall species diversity. The significant number of alders in the riparian areas would remain, as we do recognize that alders provide valuable habitat in a number of ways to a variety of species.

*Road construction should be eliminated since it provides access to the yarding of only 18 acres. Not every acre needs to be treated.*

As required by the *LSRA*, new road construction was kept to a minimum. Approximately 502 feet of new road would be built following Best Management Practices in the RMP (pp. C-4,5) and would be located on a ridgetop. The most recently published, long term study supports the practice of road

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decommissioning as an effective method to minimize undesirable effects of logging roads. (M.A. Madej. 2001. *Erosion and Sediment Delivery Following Removal of Forest Roads*. Earth Surface Processes and Landforms. Vol. 26, 175-190). The IDT evaluated the impacts of the road construction followed by road decommissioning to the benefit of enhancing late successional forest characteristics, creating immediate coarse woody debris and increasing diameter growth to provide future coarse woody debris and instream large wood sources within 18 acres and determined these long-term benefits outweigh the short term impacts. In addition, some potential areas adjacent to the project area were considered for treatment but were dropped to allow natural processes to occur. Overall, road densities will decrease following completion of this proposal.

*Larger trees on the edges of the skid roads should be protected when using existing skid roads.*

Skyline yarding corridors would be spaced approximately 150 feet apart where the skyline intersects the partial cut boundaries thus minimizing the number of yarding corridors and subsequently the number of large trees adjacent to skid roads. Skyline yarding corridors and ground base skid trails would require approval by a BLM Administrative Officer prior to felling operations. In addition a seasonal restriction for skyline yarding (generally between April 15 and June 15) would reduce the potential damage of bark slippage to all reserve trees.

*The Ea could also have considered non-commercial thinning for this 18 acre unit.*

Non-commercial thinning for the 18 acre unit was not considered for the same reasons it was not recommended for the Riparian Reserves. These reasons are outlined on page 17 of the EA.

*Do not follow the Guidelines to Reduce Bark Beetle Mortality. This is not a tree farm.*

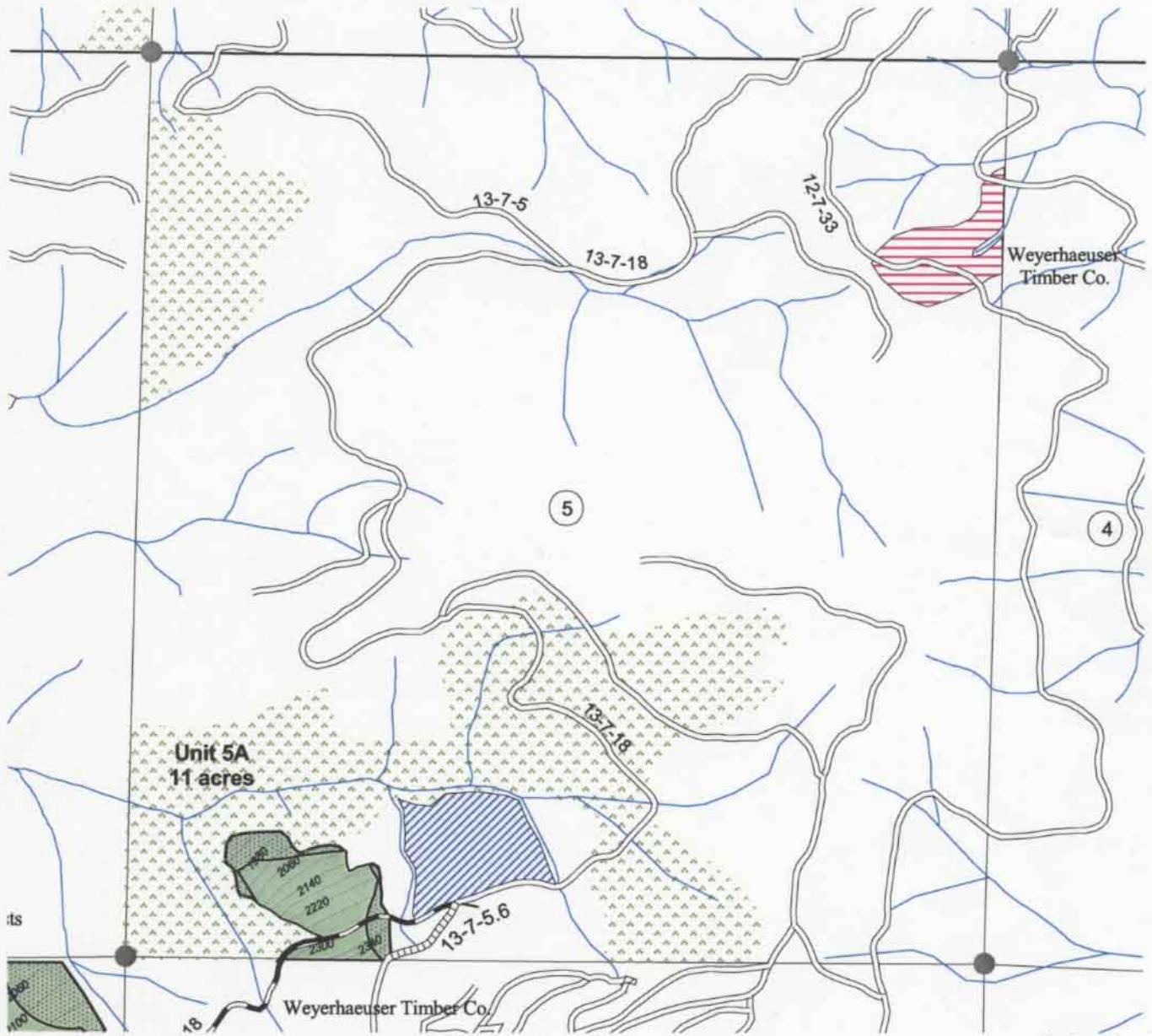
We are aware of no studies completed to date (although we believe some are being done) that show what the implications are of leaving large numbers of fresh down logs. All management in the past on Federal, State and private lands has removed the vast majority of logs, either in logging operations or salvage after fire or blowdown. The Siuslaw Guidelines are interim, conservative guidelines based on the experience and professional judgment of the entomologists who wrote it. We would prefer to assess the wood left by the logging operation, subsequent blowdown, etc, and then add wood slowly rather than risk a major beetle kill in the proposed project area.

*Alternative maps are mislabeled as “poor stocking should be replaced with appropriate stocking”.*

We recognize the inappropriate description of “poor stocking” on the EA maps and have relabeled these areas as “adequate stocking”.

**OLD BLUE EA MAP - Alternative 1**

T. 13 S., R. 7 W., Section 5, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON



Scale: 1" = 1,000'  
Contour interval = 40 ft.

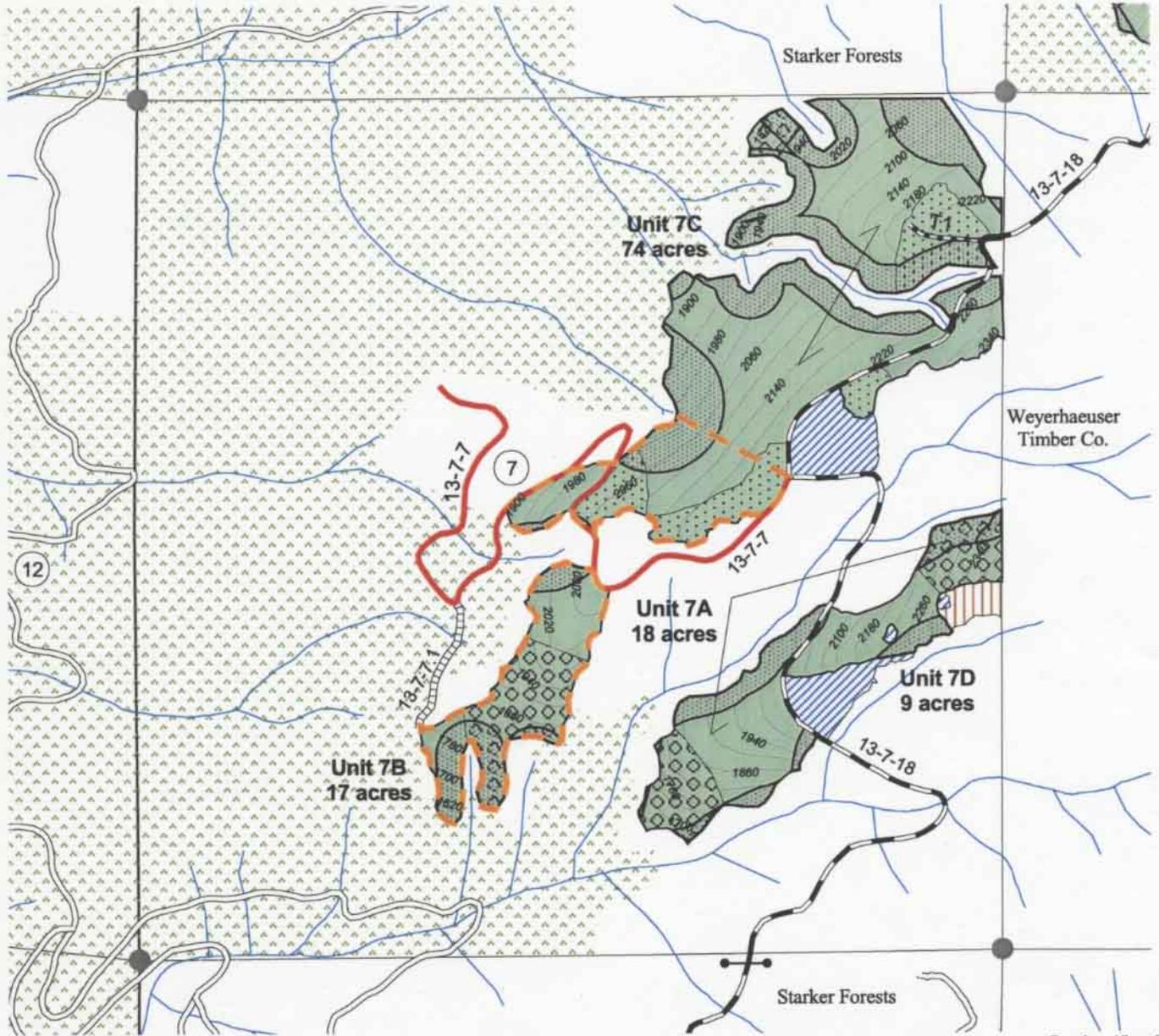
**LEGEND**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Road to be constructed/<br>decommissioned | 80+ year forest   | Density Management Area -<br>Special Yarding      |
| Existing Road                             | Streams   | Density Management Area -<br>Ground-based Yarding |
| Road to be renovated/<br>decommissioned   | Unit Boundary   | Density Management Area -<br>Skyline Yarding      |
| Road to be renovated                      | All use of mechanized<br>equipment would be<br>restricted between March 1<br>and August 5 | Riparian reserve                                  |
| Road to be decommissioned                 | Corner found  | Deferred Area - Logging feasibility               |
| Existing gate                             |   | Uneconomical to treat                             |
|   |   | Deferred Area - Poor stocking                     |

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual use or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from multiple source data and may not meet U.S. National Mapping Accuracy Standard of the Office of Management and Budget.

**OLD BLUE EA MAP - Alternative 1**

T. 13 S., R. 7 W., Section 7, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON



Scale: 1" = 1,000'  
Contour interval = 40 ft.

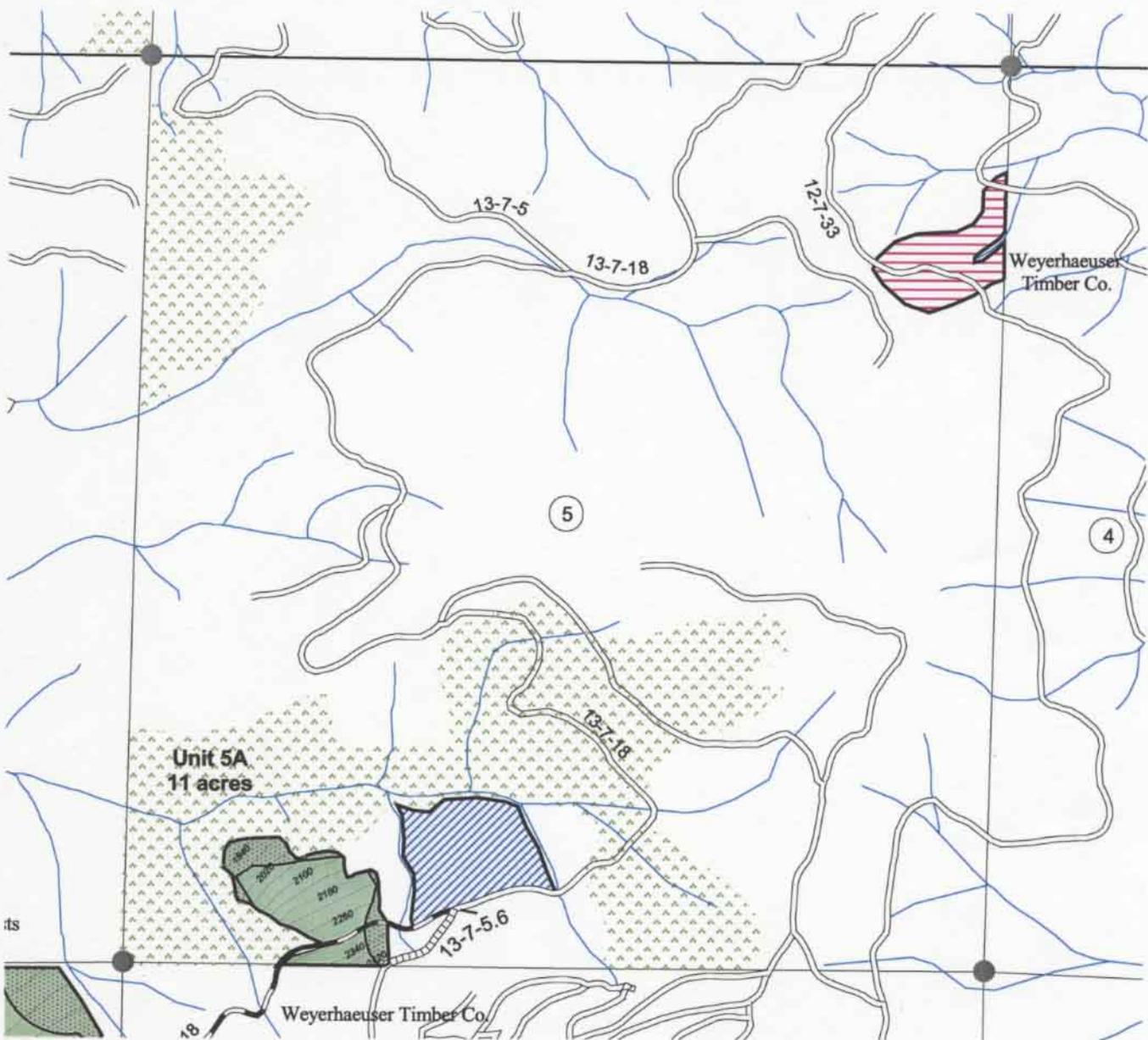
**LEGEND**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Road to be constructed/<br>decommissioned | 80+ year forest   | Density Management Area -<br>Special Yarding      |
| Existing Road                             | Streams   | Density Management Area -<br>Ground-based Yarding |
| Road to be renovated/<br>decommissioned   | Unit Boundary   | Density Management Area -<br>Skyline Yarding      |
| Road to be renovated                      | All use of mechanized<br>equipment would be<br>restricted between March 1<br>and August 5 | Riparian reserve                                  |
| Road to be decommissioned                 | Corner found  | Deferred Area - Logging feasibility               |
| Existing gate                             |   | Uneconomical to treat                             |
|   |   | Deferred Area - Poor stocking                     |

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# OLD BLUE EA MAP - Alternative 2

T. 13 S., R. 7 W., Section 5, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON



\* Note: Unit acres do not include road widths.

Scale: 1" = 1,000'  
Contour interval = 40 ft.

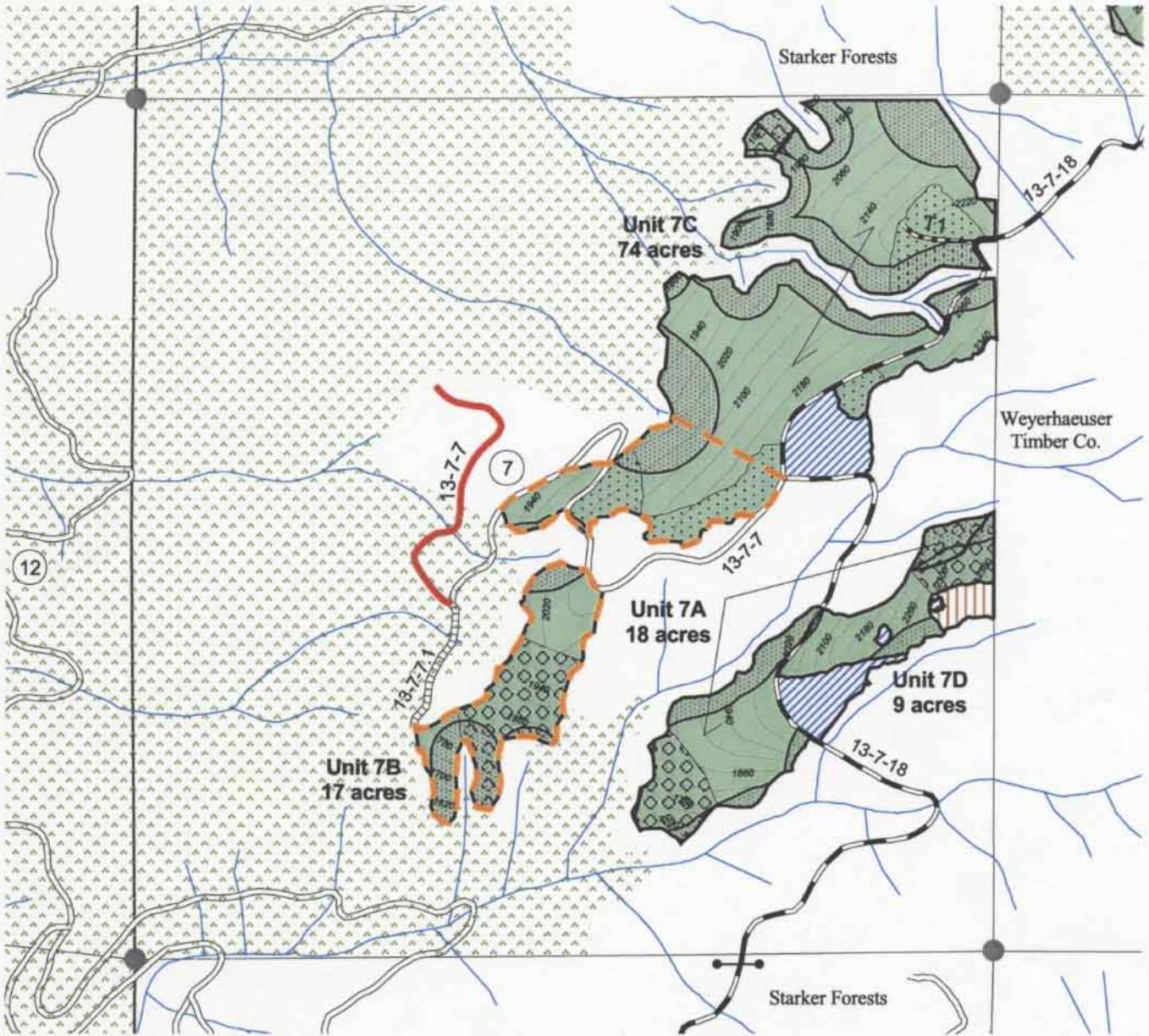
## LEGEND

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Road to be constructed/<br>decommissioned | 80+ year forest   | Density Management Area -<br>Special Yarding      |
| Existing Road                             | Streams   | Density Management Area -<br>Ground-based Yarding |
| Road to be renovated/<br>decommissioned   | Unit Boundary   | Density Management Area -<br>Skyline Yarding      |
| Road to be renovated                      | All use of mechanized<br>equipment would be<br>restricted between March 1<br>and August 5 | Riparian reserve                                  |
| Road to be decommissioned                 | Corner found  | Deferred Area - Logging feasibility               |
| Existing gate                             |   | Uneconomical to treat                             |
|   |   | Deferred Area - Poor stocking                     |

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# OLD BLUE EA MAP - Alternative 2

T. 13 S., R. 7 W., Section 7, W. M. - SALEM DISTRICT - OREGON



Scale: 1" = 1,000'  
Contour interval = 40 ft.

## LEGEND

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Road to be constructed/<br>decommissioned | 80+ year forest   | Density Management Area -<br>Special Yarding      |
| Existing Road                             | Streams   | Density Management Area -<br>Ground-based Yarding |
| Road to be renovated/<br>decommissioned   | Unit Boundary   | Density Management Area -<br>Skyline Yarding      |
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