

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Cottonwood Field Office
1 Butte Drive
Cottonwood, ID 83522

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Sheep Fire Timber Salvage Project
DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2013-0003-EA

The attached revised environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. I have determined that the proposed Sheep Fire Timber Salvage, is not a major federal action that may have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. As the Proposed Action alternative is described and analyzed, the project proposes to conduct timber salvage on public lands north east of Lucille, Idaho near John Day Mountain. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance as defined by regulations to implement NEPA found at 40 CFR 1508.27. This finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is based on my consideration of both the context and intensity of the project, as described below.

Context. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. The setting of the project is in a severely burned forested area near John Day Creek above the Salmon River Breaks West of John Day Mountain. The project has been planned to meet Desired Future Conditions (DFC) as specified in the Cottonwood Resource Management Plan faster than would occur naturally through reforestation and to capture economic value of timber lost to the 2012 Sheep Fire while minimizing impacts to other resources (EA, section 1.1). The project has been designed consistent with the 2009 Approved Cottonwood Resource Management Plan. The BLM identified issues through the scoping process that are addressed in the development and analysis of the Proposed Action and one action alternative. The resources affected by the actions, and compared to the No Action alternative, are described in chapter 3 of the EA. The project area is limited in size and effects of the activities are limited in duration. Beneficial and adverse effects are local in nature and not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of impact. The following factors are considered in evaluating intensity.

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The beneficial and adverse effects of the proposed action, as evaluated in Chapter 3 of the EA and compared to the future if no action is taken, are summarized at end of chapter 2. The project has been planned to achieve desired forest habitat conditions and capture economic value of dead and dying timber as a result of the 2012 Sheep Fire. Proposed road construction activities would provide access for timber management activities, as well as include stabilization of poorly designed roads. The adverse effects of commercial harvest, including permanent and temporary road construction are localized and short-term in nature (sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). Soil erosion from roads and skid trails is expected to remain on-site, with implementation of watershed protection measures to avoid or reduce impairing water quality (sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) and fisheries habitat (section 3.2.5). Short term disturbance to wildlife is expected during harvest (Sections 3.2.8-3.2.11). Long-term and beneficial effects are meeting DFC faster than if the area were left to natural processes alone through reforestation, capturing economic value of burned timber and improved drainage and decreased erosion on BLM roads.

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2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Timber Harvest, road repair and construction have historically occurred on public lands in the area without creating significant public safety or health problems. BLM specialists will monitor implementation to ensure occupational and public health and safety requirements are met.

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.

The Sheep Fire Timber Salvage Project will have no effect to the integrity of historic sites in the vicinity of the project (section 1.3.2). There are no park lands, prime farmlands, roadless areas, or ecologically critical areas within the affected area. Harvest of live trees will not occur. No stands meeting old-growth criteria have been identified for harvest. There would be no adverse effects to rivers within the project area that have been determined as preliminary suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation. Adverse effects to wetlands or riparian areas within the affected area would be avoided or reduced with implementation of proposed project design features (sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the project are limited to the Sheep Fire Timber Salvage project area. Based upon reports and discussions with professional resource specialists and coordination with other agencies, there is agreement about the effects and conclusions identified in the analysis. The effects of this project do not represent a controversial impact upon the quality of the human environment, provided the environmental design and monitoring measures outlined in the EA (section 2.1.9) are implemented.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The BLM has a long history of implementing activities as proposed on other areas, and on similar soil and vegetation types. The direct and indirect effects as disclosed in the EA are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The technical analyses conducted to determine impacts to the affected resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data and professional judgment.

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.

As described in chapter 2, the proposed actions conform to direction from the BLM Cottonwood RMP to achieve desired forest habitat conditions and capture economic value of timber killed as a result of the 2012 Sheep Fire, is designed to include applicable measures to mitigate (avoid or reduce) negative impacts on affected resource values, and includes monitoring and evaluation. The proposed action does not set precedent for future actions.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Other past, present and foreseeable actions are described and cumulative effects on affected resources are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA. There is a low, but not discountable risk of landslides associated with the proposed activities on moderate and high landslide risk areas. The project includes measures to reduce potential impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat and conserve special status fish, wildlife and plant

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species. Changes to forest vegetation and wildlife habitat are not expected to contribute cumulative impacts when considered with impacts of other activities in the watershed. The impacts of the proposed action on all resources would generally result in improvement over the future conditions if the project is not implemented due to the scale of reforestation as described in Section 2.1.4). There are no related actions associated with the proposed action.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

An intensive cultural resource inventory was conducted for the proposed project area and no properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register were found.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its designated critical habitat that has been listed, or is proposed to be listed or designated, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Viable populations of species would be maintained as required by the ESA and BLM Special Status Species policy (BLM MS 6840). For ESA-listed fish species, the EA includes an analysis for ESA-listed fish (section 3.2.5), and incorporates information from a biological assessment (BA) that BLM submitted pursuant to section 7 of the ESA to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for bull trout, and the National Marine Fisheries Service for sockeye salmon, fall Chinook salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon and steelhead trout and their designated critical habitat. In addition, the BA for the anadromous species included an analysis for essential fish habitat pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which is defined as “those waters and substrate necessary for fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity.” Listed species and their habitat that the project would *not* affect are, sockeye salmon and fall Chinook salmon. The BLM determined that the project is “*likely to adversely affect*” bull trout, spring/summer Chinook Salmon, and steelhead trout, considering the size of the proposed vegetation treatments (916 acres), proximity to high value aquatic habitats (John Day Creek), and the amount of vegetation treatments that would occur on moderate and high risk landslide prone areas, and the level of soil disturbance created by the Sheep Fire. Project design and monitoring measures have been incorporated into all treatments, road work, and restoration activities to avoid or minimize potential for adverse effects occurring from erosion/sediment and mass wasting events. However, the affected landtypes in the drainage areas are subject to climatic events that have resulted in flood damage and mass wasting. Even though risks may be low from project related actions, effects from mass wasting or debris torrents may be substantial if such occurs. BLM’s implementation of the project will include commitments to protect and conserve the species and their habitat, and formal consultation under the ESA on the proposed action concluded with a non-jeopardy opinion (reference FWS and NMFS BOs). As a result of consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the no harvest buffers for the project have been doubled to decrease the likelihood of project related sediment reaching a stream channel.

No effect or insignificant adverse effects are anticipated on special status wildlife species, as analyzed in section 3.2.11 of the EA. The project is *not likely to adversely affect* ESA-listed Canada lynx, and have *no effect* or *no impact* on Northern Idaho ground squirrel or the candidate yellow-billed cuckoo and wolverine. For BLM-sensitive gray wolf and fisher, the analysis concludes that the project “*may impact individuals or habitat but is not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or reduce viability for the population or species.*” No impact is expected on BLM-sensitive bats and birds that are not likely to occur in the project area, and project implementation may disturb numerous sensitive birds but not cause a trend toward listing.

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Special status plants are analyzed in section 3.2.6 of the EA. The project area has not been surveyed, but no known suitable habitat is present, nor any ESA listed plant populations found, so the project would have no effect on the threatened MacFarlane's four-o'clock and Spalding catchfly or candidate Whitebark pine. Although individuals may be impacted by the project, implementation would not cause a trend toward federal listing of the species.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

As described in the EA, the BLM has planned the project to incorporate applicable Federal, State and local requirements and best management practices to ensure management activities do not violate any law, and that the project meets objectives to maintain or improve forest vegetation/habitat, soil, water, riparian and aquatic resources (sections 2.1, 2.1.9). In addition to protection imposed under the ESA as discussed for factor 9, this includes meeting requirements of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Idaho State Water Quality Standards, Idaho Forest Practices Act, and Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act. Burning activities would comply with air quality requirements and implement the EPA and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality permit procedures outlined in the North Idaho Smoke Management Memorandum of Agreement (section 2.1.5 and 3.2.14). An in-depth discussion of effects on aquatic resources is included in the section 3.2.3 (Water Resources), and as discussed for factor 9, the analysis in sections 3.2.5 (Fisheries, Aquatic Habitats, and Special Status Species).

Conclusion

Based upon my review of the EA, I have determined that the Sheep Fire Timber Salvage Project will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

/s/

7/26/13

Will Runnoe, Field Manager
Cottonwood Field Office

Date