

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Project Name/ Applicant: Grizzly Bear Complex Timber Salvage Project

Project/Case File Number:

Project Lead: Eric Ott

CE Number: DOI-BLM-OR-V050-2015-053-CX

Date of Preparation: October 27th, 2015

BACKGROUND:

The Grizzly Complex fire is located in the Columbia Plateau physiographic province. The fire started August 13, 2015, from 18 lightning strikes that grew together about 20 miles SE of Dayton, WA, within the Umatilla National Forest. The fires burned 76,475 acres in the counties of Columbia, WA, Garfield, WA and Wallowa, OR. Of these acres, 583 are on OR Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered land; 62,329 are on USFS administered land; 2,265 are on private land; and 663 are on state administered land. The BLM lands are within the Wenaha River and Grande Ronde River watersheds.

From ground verification after the fire, the BLM has estimated that 300 acres of commercially viable BLM timber was burned at low to high severity. Of this acreage, an estimated 250 acres were moderately to severely burned within the fire perimeter to cause 75-100% mortality within the stands, of which this Categorical Exclusion (CX) calls for the salvage of a maximum of 168 acres. The areas proposed for salvage occur on benches with slopes $\leq 35\%$ and more than 0.25 miles from any water body, with the majority of the salvage acreage ≥ 1 miles away from any water body.

Burned forests serve as an attractant to several forest damaging insect species such as bark beetles (*Scolytinae*) and flat-head borers (*Buprestidae*). This attraction not only leads to the fast deterioration of the burnt wood by insect boring, but also puts the remaining healthy trees at risk if epidemic insect levels are reached. Trees stressed from partial burning are at an increased risk of insects and diseases. Salvaging trees will not only focus on utilizing the burnt timber, but also promote landscape level forest health by removing partially burned (>30% crown scorched) stressed trees.

In addition, killed trees will act as fuel for future fires. Although many of the smaller sized fuels (1-10-hour) have been consumed, there are many standing 100-1000 hour fuels that have been killed and unconsumed. These unconsumed fuels will increase fire risk once the 1-10hr fuels are regrown. This is likely to occur during the next 5 years.

No weed spraying or tree planting will not take place associated with this this CX. All weed treatments and tree planting will be done in accordance to any following ES&R plan and the Baker Resource Management Plan.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

The proposed action is located in the Grande Ronde River area, within 0.7-5.5 miles of Troy, OR. The area is legally described as: Wallowa County, Oregon,

T. 06 N., R. 42 E., sections 14, 15, 22, 23, 25

T. 06 N., R. 43 E., sections 31

T. 05 N., R. 43 E., sections 5, 6

T. 05 N., R. 42 E., sections 14

This proposal consists of the removal of standing dead and dying Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and Western larch (*Larix occidentalis*) trees to utilize and recover economic value of dead and dying trees (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The stands are situated at low elevations (2,000-3,000 feet) between open meadows and agricultural land and the Douglas-fir/Grand fir forests at higher elevations. The stands are characterized by hot, dry summers and historically frequent fires. The proposed treatment would salvage dead and dying trees on approximately 168 acres, within the fire perimeter of the Wenaha River and Grande Ronde River watersheds. These proposed nine salvage stands are scattered throughout the area on benches and along roads. Approximately 400,000 board feet of timber would be salvaged using ground-based and tractor yarding systems (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The fire consumed much of the fine and coarse woody debris on the forest floor. This left a deficit of microsite environments that can enhance planting success through moisture retention. The salvage harvest will require some slash being left in the forest to increase microsite environments in an effort to enhance planting success. In addition, slash would be lopped and scattered in portions of the harvest area with emphasis on skid-trails and erosion prone slopes (30-35% slope) to prevent erosion and discourage off-road vehicular use.

Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) is an integral part of the forest ecosystem in Eastern Oregon. Aspen is important for wildlife and of increasing concern throughout the intermountain west because of a general decline in health and distribution. Sprouting, the primary form of reproduction from burned mature aspen, has been observed in the fall of 2015. Large clonal aspen pockets will be avoided during salvage operations to maintain the integrity of aspen root systems to promote vigorous sprouting. Aspen occur in small <5 acre pockets throughout the units.

Standing dead trees are important for migrating birds as a foraging site for insects and as nesting and habitat structure for other species. At least two snags per acre would be retained in the project area for wildlife purposes (Reynolds et al 1992, Thomas 1979). These retained snags would include: suitable wildlife snags; and trees with <30% crown scorch. Two snags/acre $\geq 18''$ dbh will be left standing. Trees exhibiting exceptional wildlife characteristics such as hollow boles and forked tops will be selected for retention. Three downed logs/acre $\geq 12''$ diameter will be maintained on site.

Stipulations in the contract will enforce the use of existing skid trails. All skid trails will be rehabilitated by depositing slash, seeding and water barring. Treatment areas would be accessed by existing roads when possible. Less than 0.5mi of temporary road will be constructed and fully

rehabilitated by re-contouring slopes, depositing slash, seeding and water barring. These temporary roads would be dead-end turn arounds in unit 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 to access BLM and minimize skidding distances. No temporary roads will cross streams or be within stream buffers.

PLAN CONFORMANCE:

The proposed action is in conformance with the Baker Resource Area, Resource Management Plan (1989).

Allowable Harvest:

Salvage logging is allowed in the 1989 Baker RMP. Further, the Baker RMP directs an approximate 24,000 Mbf of Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) timber harvest over 10 years from the commercial forest land base in the Baker Resource Area (BRA). The Dark Canyon Salvage Timber sale, which is currently under protest offered 991 Mbf. Currently, the BRA has harvested 2,775 Mbf (approximately 10% of ASQ) over the last 10 years, which is well below sustainable levels.

During the past ten years, the total non-juniper forested acres that have been restoratively treated (commercial or pre-commercially logged) are approximately 1000 acres of Resource Area's total forested land base of 37,494 acres. This is approximately 2.67% of the forested land base. It should also be noted that the Preferred Alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (November, 2011) for the Baker RMP Revision which focuses on restorative forest treatments, allows for a maximum decadal Proposed Sale Quantity (PSQ) of 10,000 Mbf to be commercially thinned from 3,000 acres per decade. This equates to just under 10% of the non-juniper forested land base per decade.

Standard Design Features:

The standard design features outlined in the 1989 RMP will be followed. A selected subset of these is reiterated here for further clarification:

Snags: Two trees/acre $\geq 18''$ dbh. Three downed logs/acre $\geq 12''$ diameter.

Slope: Limit harvest to slopes $\leq 35\%$

Slash: Utilize slash to armor skid trails and slopes prone to erosion.

Streams: No perennial, Threatened or Endangered (T&E) fish-bearing streams occur within any of the units. The nearest stream is 0.50 mile away from the nearest project boundary.

Weather: Logging will be limited to frozen or dry ground.

Temporary road: Temporary roads will not cross streams or wetlands and be limited to 0.50 miles. These will be laid out by the district forester and fish biologist.

Road maintenance: Road maintenance will be a part of the logging contract to improve stream protection of existing roads and to aid in land stabilization efforts. No new culverts or crossings will be installed or utilized.

Cultural inventory: The site has been inventoried for cultural significance and any/all sites will be avoided.

Wildlife: The area has been surveyed for wildlife concerns.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

The proposed action is categorically excluded under US Department of Interior manual part 516, Appendix 1, categorical exclusion 1.12, and is consistent with the Baker Resource Area Management plan.

516 DM 11.9, C. *Forestry* (8) applies to salvaging dead or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than 0.5 mile of temporary road construction. Such activities:

- a) *May include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.*
- b) *May include temporary roads which are defined as roads authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation not intended to be part of the BLM transportation system and not necessary for long-term resource management. Temporary roads shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources; and*
- c) *Shall require the treatment of temporary roads constructed or used so as to permit the reestablishment, by artificial or natural means, of vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover was disturbed by the construction or use of the road, as necessary to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Such treatment shall be designed to reestablish vegetative cover as soon as practicable, but at least within 10 years after the termination of the contract.*
- d) *For this CX, a dying tree is defined as a standing tree that has been severely damaged by forces such as fire, wind, ice, insects, or disease, and that in the judgment of an experienced forest professional or someone technically trained for the work, is likely to die within a few years.*

The application of this categorical exclusion (CX) is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly impact the environment. BLM has reviewed the proposed action to determine if any exceptions described in 516 DM 2.3A, appendix 2 apply, and there were no exceptions that applied.

The proposed action **will not** be conducted in (1) wilderness areas or where they would impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation of wilderness; (2) will not include the use of herbicides or pesticides; and (3) will not involve the construction of new permanent roads or other infrastructure.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRING PREPARATION OF AN EA OR EIS (516 DM 2, APPENDIX 2)

The action described in categorical exclusion # DOI-BLM-ID-I020-2014-0009-CX has been reviewed to determine that none of the extraordinary circumstances listed below pertain to the proposed action.

DM# Extraordinary Circumstances

- 2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety
- *No issues were identified. The armoring of slopes with slash, improved water control on roads and removal of hazard trees should improve conditions for public safety.*
- 2.2 Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.
- *There would be no significant impact on these resources. The removal of burned timber will not have any significant impact to migratory bird populations. The cultural resources are currently being mapped and any spots will be flagged and avoided. The proposed salvage units are outside the wild or scenic river corridor.*
- 2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)].
- *There are no highly controversial effects or unresolved conflicts. BLM range staff have coordinated with the salvage operations and discussed the project. Due to the fire, cattle should not be present while salvage harvest is occurring. The BLM informed the Wallowa County Commissioners of the proposed action and no controversial effects or conflicts were identified.*
- 2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.
- *Salvage logging would not have highly uncertain, potentially significant, uncertain or unique environmental effects. Harvest would take place in an area that has been harvested in the past. Equipment will stay on existing roads or skid trails on slopes less than 35%. Slash (tree tops and limbs) will be left on site for erosion control on skid trails and steep slopes. All temporary road will be situated away from water sources and be fully rehabilitated at the end of the project.*
- 2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.
- *Salvage logging would not establish a precedent that would affect future actions. The area has been identified in the Baker RMP (1989) as commercial timber area. The BLM will replant after harvest is complete if seed sources are absent.*
- 2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.
- *Following the fire, there is considerable fire rehabilitation work that is proposed. These proposals aim to restore the fire area, repair damaged fences and*

pipelines, reestablish vegetation, ensure wildlife habitat and to control erosion to the existing road network. These proposed undertakings, along with timber salvage will hasten the rehabilitation and stabilization of the burned areas, thus reducing the possibility of cumulatively significant effects.

- 2.7 Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.
- *The BLM has conducted a Class III cultural resources inventory of the entire project area. All sites have been flagged and avoided with a 20 meter buffer. No properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places will be affected.*
- 2.8 Have significant impacts on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species.
- *The project area is not within general or priority sage grouse habitat. There are no leks in the area. The project area is within deer, elk and bighorn sheep habitat. The salvage activities will not impact sage grouse or the big game habitat. No T+E species occur within the unit boundaries. Bull trout, Snake River spring chinook, and Snake River steelhead occur within the Wenaha and Grande Ronde watersheds. The nearest unit boundary is over 0.25 miles from the rivers and will not affect fish. The haul road off the mountain is on open existing routes.*
- 2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.
- *This project will not violate and Federal, State, local, or tribal laws. There are no stream within the unit boundaries, the area has been inventoried and cleared by a BLM botanist for sensitive and endangered plants and cleared by a BLM biologist for any wildlife concerns. All stipulations of the Oregon Forest Practices Act will be followed.*
- 2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).
- *This project will likely create jobs that could employ members of low income and/or minority populations.*
- 2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).
- *The BLM has conducted a Class III inventory of the entire project area. All sites have been flagged and will be avoided with a 20 meter buffer. No properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places will be affected. There are no known ceremonial sites within the project area. Salvaging timber will not restrict any valid treaty rights within the area. Consultation with potentially affected Native Tribes will occur prior to implementation.*

2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

- *This is not anticipated due to an active weed program and stipulations that will be included in the contract. All equipment used in the salvage project will be washed and cleared by BLM representatives before being allowed on the project area. The area will have an active weed spraying presence for the next several years due to the Grizzly Bear Complex fire and with the implementation of the Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation plan for that fire complex.*

LITERATURE CITED:

Reynolds, R. T., Graham, R. T., & Reiser, M. H. 1992. Management recommendations for the northern goshawk in the southwestern United States.

Thomas, Jack Ward [Technical Editor] 1979. Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests the Blue Mountains of Oregon and Washington. Agriculture Handbook No. 553. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 512 p.

PERSONS AND AGENCIES COORDINATED:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wallowa County Commissioners
Nez Perce Tribe

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT:

Lori Wood- Field Manager
Melissa Yzquierdo Primus- Wildlife Biologist
Katherine Coddington- Archeologist
John Quintela- Fisheries Biologist
Eric Ott- District Forester

RECOMMENDATION:

The proposed action is categorically excluded as outlined in 516 DM (11.9, C. Forestry (8)) and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply.

DECISION RECORD

Based on the Categorical Exclusion Documentation, DOI-BLM-OR-V050-2015-053-CX, I have determined that the proposed action to salvage dead and dying trees on approximately 168 acres of burned area involves no significant impacts to the human environment and requires no further environmental analysis. It is my decision to authorize this action as proposed. For additional information concerning this project, contact Project Lead, Eric Ott, Baker Field Office, 3100 H Street, Baker City, Oregon 97814. Phone (541) 523-1256.

Eric Ott Forester 11/19/2015
Prepared By: Title Date

Yan S. Quinn ASST. FIELD MANAGER 11/19/15
Reviewed By: Title Date

Steve Dodd Field Manager 11/19/15
Authorizing Official Title Date

DECISION AND RATIONALE

I have decided to implement the Grizzly Bear Fire Complex Salvage project. I have reviewed the project and determined that the proposed action is categorically excluded under US Department of Interior manual 11.9, C. Forestry (8) and in conformance with the Baker Resource Management Plan. Implementation of the proposed action would help recover economic value from dead and dying trees, reduce residual fuels, enhance microsite environments for tree planting, stimulate the growth of aspen, and reduce the opportunity for the epidemic spread of insects and disease. Mechanical removal will be used to achieve project goals. These actions meet the needs for the project.

/s/Lori Wood, Baker Field Manager

Date: 11/19/2015

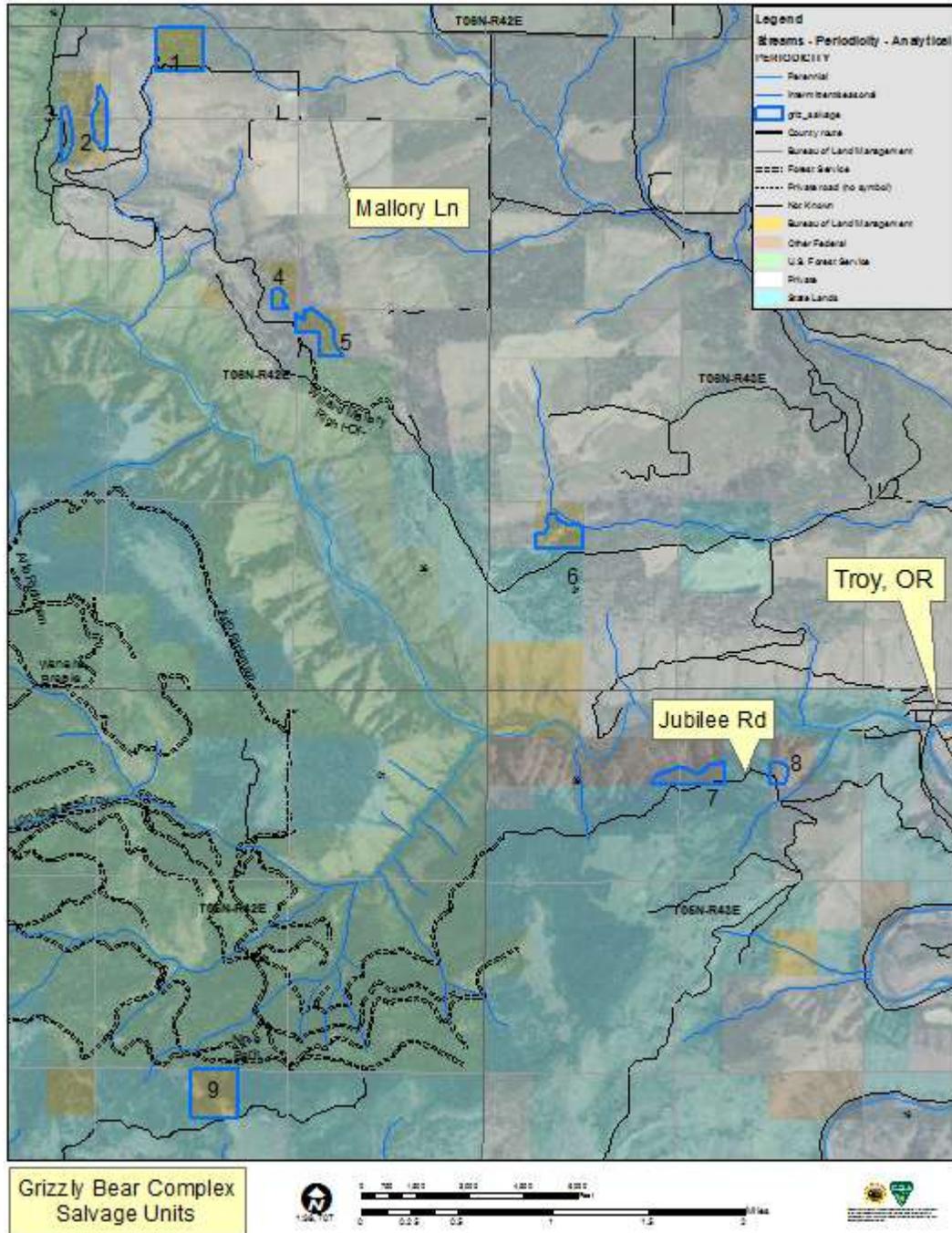


Figure 1. A map of identified timber salvage units within the Grizzly Bear Complex Salvage CX.

Figure 2. A table of unit acreage, trees per acre and, average diameter at breast height (DBH).

Unit #	Acres	Avg DBH	Tree/Acre
1	37.24	16	142
2	13.45	14	175
3	8.66	15	162
4	3.88	14	180
5	18.25	14	176
6	20.78	15	154
7	19.49	16	142
8	6.07	13	178
9	40	13	172
totals	167.82		

Protest and Appeals Information

The forest management decision to be made on the action described in this categorical exclusion is subject to protest under 43 CFR subpart 5003. Under 43 CFR 5003.2 subsection (b), the decision will be published in local newspaper(s) as a notice of sale and this notice shall constitute the decision document. Under 43 CFR 5003.3 subsection (a), protests may be filed with the authorized officer within 15 days of the publication date of the notice of timber sale advertisement. Under 43 CFR 5003.3 (b), protest(s) filed with the authorized officer shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision. A decision on this protest would be subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, although, under 43 CFR 5003.1 subsection (a), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of a decision governing or relating to forest management under 43 CFR 5003.2 or 5003.3.