



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Medford District Office
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford>

1792(ORM060)
DOI-BLM-ORWA- 2012-0001-EA

JAN 05 2016

Dear Interested Public:

The BLM is authorizing to thin 123 acres of previously-managed, single-storied forest stands to facilitate their development into multi-age stands with varied structure and diverse tree species composition. The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin is located in the Matrix land use allocation of the Middle South Fork Little Butte Creek sub-watershed in Section 27, T. 38 S., R. 3 E. and the Upper Jenny Creek sub-watershed in Section 32, T. 38 S., R. 4 E., W.M.

This project was analyzed under the 2012 Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project (IVMP) Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-ORWA-2012-0001-EA). The BLM provided a 30-day public comment period for the EA in August and September 2012. The IVMP EA was developed to provide a tool for accomplishing work that promotes healthy and resilient forest landscapes and species conservation, and provides forest products that contribute to the sustainability of local communities and industries.

A Draft Decision Record (DR) and Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for this project were posted on the Medford District's ePlanning website (<http://1.usa.gov/1NlrPuT>) on December 15, 2015 for a 15-day public review. No written comments were received. The BLM will publish the Final DR and FONSI on the Medford District's ePlanning website and a notice in Medford's *Mail Tribune*. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3.

For additional information contact me at 541-618-2438. Hardcopies of the Final DR and Final FONSI are also available at the Medford Interagency Office at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 7:45am to 4:30pm, closed on holidays.

Sincerely,

John Gerritsma
Field Manager
Ashland Resource Area



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
3040 BIDDLE ROAD MEDFORD, OREGON 97504

PROGRAMMATIC INTEGRATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT
NEPA# DOI-BLM-ORWA-2012-0001-EA
Ashland Resource Area
Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin
January 2016

DECISION RECORD

I. INTRODUCTION

This document describes my decision to transform 123 acres of plantations planted with off-site pine from an even-age single-story canopy to multi-age stands that are varied in structure and diverse in species composition. The project is located in the Matrix land use allocation.

Treatments will thin from below or create small openings ($\leq \frac{1}{2}$ acre) where small-diameter pine is present to reduce competition and increase growth for residual trees as described in the proposed action for each unit and as illustrated in Map 1 and 2. The treatments will also reduce mistletoe and insect infestations. Treatments are commercial and merchantable trees will be sold at fair market value. Trees will be removed using a ground-based logging system (e.g., tractor, skidder) on designated skid roads or a harvester to fall, process, and bunch trees off of designated skid roads. A forwarder may operate off of skid roads, or a skidder would operate on designated skid roads and bring the trees to the landing. If a harvester is applied, it would leave skid roads to access trees to be cut. The harvester may walk on the slash created by the processing of logs (see the Project Design Features to minimize impacts to soils, p. 5-6). There would be no entry in Riparian Reserves.

Openings created through treatment will be planted with tree species suited to the site (e.g., Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and sugar pine) to improve planting stock survivability and restore characteristic structure and composition and increase heterogeneity. Planting would have a 10-foot x 10-foot spacing.

Slash created from treatments will be lop-and-scattered, or hand-piled and burned following treatment depending on resultant fuel loading.

There are 30 acres of treatment where dispersal-only habitat would occur within NSO habitat. Treatments would treat and maintain the habitat type and would retain the same functionality post-treatment because only small diameter material and understory/mid-story components would be removed. A minimum of 40 percent canopy cover would be retained. No nesting, roosting, foraging (NRF) habitat would be treated in the project. None of the treatment units occur in designated NSO Critical Habitat units and therefore, would have no effect to any

designated NSO Critical Habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project May Affect, but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA) northern spotted owls because the project will follow NLAA standards described on pages 34-40 of the Medford IVM Biological Assessment (BA), the Project Design Features on page 9 of this Decision Record, and the Project Design Criteria of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion.

The Project Area is located on BLM-Administered land in the Ashland Resource Area; Section 27, T. 38 S., R. 3 E. and Section 32, T. 38 S., R. 4 E., W.M. (see Map 1 and 2).

Treatment Objectives

These stands were historically multi-storied, uneven-age mixed conifer sites that consisted primarily of white fir, Douglas-fir and smaller quantities of incense cedar and sugar pine. The treatment goals for these stands are:

- Transform off-site pine plantations from an even-age single-story canopy to a multi-age stand that is varied in structure and diverse in species composition (IVM EA, p. 7, 8).
- Reduce tree density and increase structural and spatial heterogeneity (IVM EA, p. 3).
- Create small openings ($\leq 1/2$ acre) and plant tree species suited to the ecological conditions of the site that will best use the productive capacity of these forest lands (IVM EA, p. 7).
- Create small openings in spotted owl dispersal habitat to create more than one age class in the stand and restore tree species diversity while maintaining dispersal habitat (IVM EA, p. 7).
- Maintain and improve leave tree vigor and growth while increasing pest resistance (IVM EA, p. 3).
- Reduce stand components susceptible to insect and disease attack (IVM EA, p. 3).
- Increase presence of historic tree species by retaining Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and ponderosa pine. Retain current tree species diversity suitable for the site such as sugar pine, Pacific yew, and golden chinquapin.
- Retain all trees >20 inches diameter at breast height (dbh).

Background and Treatment Descriptions

Background and Current Condition for Greensprings (Unit 120980)

The unit was commercially harvested in 1948, 1963, 1976, and 1980 and re-planted with Bareroot Ponderosa pine and Jeffrey pine. The units were pre-commercially thinned in 1976 with a spacing of 15 feet x 15 feet.

The composition of the stands is pre-dominantly even-aged off-site Ponderosa pine and Jeffrey pine with a minor amount of native, mature Douglas-fir, white fir and incense cedar. Average dbh is approximately 17 inches and the average tree height is estimated at 70 feet. Stand basal area averages 132 square feet and ranges from 100 to 180 square feet. Crown cover percentage

is 60 percent and spacing is calculated to be 21 feet x 21 feet with 97 trees per acre. A small amount of white fir is regenerating in the understory.

This area experienced heavy tree mortality from gophers and frost damage during regeneration. As a result, there are some openings in the stands as well as many clumps of commercial-size trees resulting from close spacing at the initial planting. There are also commercial-sized trees remaining with poor tree form. Most of these trees will eventually become suppressed after the surrounding healthy trees grow above them.

Proposed Action for Green Springs (Unit 120980)

Tree clumps will be commercially thinned from below, targeted to retain 100 square feet of basal area per acre. The largest/healthiest trees will be favored for retention in these clumps and a minimum 40 percent canopy cover will be retained at the unit level following treatment. To enhance stand level diversity and to create a new age class, Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and sugar pine seedling will be planted in the small openings created from thinning.

Marking these plantations will favor leaving suitable Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and Ponderosa pine trees (disease free, non-chlorotic, crown ratios ≥ 30 percent) over white fir trees.

The following signs/symptoms of poor health will be targeted for harvesting in white fir, Douglas-fir, and to a lesser degree, Ponderosa pine:

- decreased terminal growth
- needle yellowing
- crown decline (narrow crowns with die off)

To minimize motorized vehicle use into this unit, existing spur trails will be barricaded with logs or slash. Blockage at the entrance would consist of placing logs, slash, boulders, earthen berms, and other material so the entrance is camouflaged for a minimum distance of 100 feet or as needed to prevent unauthorized vehicle use.

Background and Current Condition for Green Springs (Unit 122431) and Buck Quarry (Unit 122429)

The units were clearcut in 1961 and re-planted with bareroot Ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine and Shasta red fir in 1963, 1964 and 1995. The units were pre-commercially thinned in 1998 with a spacing of 24 feet x 24 feet. The composition of the stands is predominantly even-aged off-site Ponderosa pine and Jeffrey pine with a minor amount of native mature Douglas-fir, white fir and incense cedar. Average dbh is approximately 15 inches and the average tree height is estimated at 70 feet. Stand basal area averages 115 square feet and ranges from 40 to 160 square feet. Crown cover percentage is 78 percent and spacing is calculated to be 20 feet x 20 feet with 101 trees per acre. A fair amount of white fir and a small amount of Douglas-fir are regenerating in the understory. Heavy mistletoe infections are observed in the mature Douglas-fir. Multiple leaders and poor form are common in the pine and most likely due to past snow-break, frost and mal-adaptation of the nursery stock to the planting site.

Proposed Action for Units 122431 and 122429

Recent plantings on the Dead Indian Memorial Plateau show evidence that planting stock survivability and performance of Douglas-fir, incense cedar and sugar pine are improved when planted in small ½-acre openings. To establish a new age class and restore species diversity in these stands, the treatment will create small ½-acre openings and plant native tree species such as Douglas-fir, incense cedar, and sugar pine across these areas. There are 20 pre-selected newly created ½-acre openings identified by the silviculturalist (see Map 2). The canopy cover will change from 78 percent to 55 percent retention.

The barricade at the beginning of BLM Road 38-4E-32.4 will be removed for access to the unit and then replaced after treatment is complete. The road will be bladed.

Information Updates

Pacific Fisher

Since the release of the Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management EA, the USFWS issued a proposal to list the West Coast Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of fisher as a Threatened species under the ESA (79 FR 194:60419-60425). The BLM reviewed the Draft Species Report¹ and other materials relating to the proposal and determined the analysis in the EA (p. 92-93) for the Pacific fisher and its habitat is still valid.

Gray Wolf

The gray wolf is a federally listed species in Oregon west of Highways 395 and 78. Until 2011, gray wolves were only known to occur in Oregon east of these highways. In September 2011, one radio collared male wolf (OR-7) disappeared from the Innaha pack in Northeastern Oregon. Since 2011, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has been tracking OR-7's dispersal, which included some time in Northern California.

In January 2015, ODFW identified OR-7, his mate, and pups as the Rogue Pack and the known wolf activity map was updated on the ODFW website on January 13, 2015. ODFW also identified the Keno Area of Known Wolf Activity (AKWA) at this time. The project is within the updated known wolf activity of the Keno AKWA. The BLM was in communication with ODFW this season and as of July 13, 2015, there was no evidence of wolves in the Keno AKWA in the last 4 months.

Prior to each spring turnout season, communication between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the BLM will occur to determine if any wolf activity has expanded or moved into the Project Area. ODFW would contact the BLM if wolf activity is in the Project Area to determine specific application of ODFW's Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (2011). The State wolf conservation plan includes management strategies to minimize potential negative interactions between wolves and forest management activities.

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Draft Species Report, Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*), West Coast Population. January 13, 2014, www.fws.gov/cno/es/fisher

Effects from this project are not expected because activities would not disturb key wolf areas such as den sites and rendezvous sites, would not change prey availability, and would not increase public access in the area known to be used for denning and rendezvous sites. No effects from disturbance are expected at this time, but proposed project will need to be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout its duration.

Project Design Features

The following Project Design Features developed for the Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project will be applied to the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project to eliminate or reduce impacts to the environment.

Riparian Reserves

- There will be no logging operations within the Riparian Reserves including unstable areas.
- No logging slash will be piled in no-treatment areas².
- Trees will be directionally felled away from the no treatment areas (including dry draws).
- If any trees greater than 20 inches dbh need to be felled for safety reasons within Riparian Reserves, trees of this size will be felled towards the stream and left on the ground.

Logging Systems

- Ground-based equipment operations will occur during the dry season, generally May 15 through October 15, or on approval by the Authorized Officer or Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). Variations in these dates will be dependent upon review of weather and soil moisture conditions by the project soil scientist or hydrologist.
- Old skid trails will not be opened or driven on without the approval of the Authorized Officer or COR.
- Designated skid roads will be located on slopes less than 35 percent.
- Trees will be felled toward skid trails.
- Skid trails and tractor and hand fire-lines will be water-barred based on gradient and erosion class according to District guidelines prior to Oct 15 (RMP, p.167).
- Skid trails will be blocked where they intersect roads and landings with an approved barricade and/or scattered slash to preclude Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use.
- The BLM will immediately shut down all harvest and yarding operations if there is potential for sediment movement to waterways due to weather or soil moisture conditions.
- For stands previously logged with tractors, existing skid roads will be utilized. If new skid trails are needed, the overall 12 percent compaction standard will not be exceeded.

² Presence of streams and determination of Riparian Reserve boundaries were ground verified by resource specialists in the field.

- Skid trails will be located to minimize disturbance to coarse woody debris. Where skid trails encounter large coarse woody debris, a section will be bucked out for equipment access. The remainder will be left in place and not disturbed.
- When operationally feasible, all units will be yarded in such a way that the coarse woody material remaining after logging will be maintained at or greater than current levels in order to protect the soil surface.
- Mechanized equipment will be required to be capable of reaching out 20 feet.
- Mechanized equipment will be restricted to designated skid trails or if the conditions meet the following parameters and it will not result in detrimental compaction of over 12 percent of the unit area as determined by the project soil scientist. This may be achieved by several ways based on site-specific assessment and includes, but is not restricted to, operation in dry (less than 15 percent soil moisture) conditions; walking mechanized equipment on slash; avoiding soil series at inherent risk to detrimental compaction; or the use of “ghost trails,” skid trails that have had only one or two passes. When these conditions no longer exist, operations will cease.
 - The 15 percent soil moisture standard could be modified based on moisture content at which specific soil is the most resistive to compaction.
 - Ground-based equipment will be allowed on snow only when the snowpack is sufficient to protect the soil. Operations will be allowed to start when there is a minimum of 20 inches of snow, however no logging will be allowed once the snow depth deteriorates below 18 inches of snow to protect soil from compaction (USDI 1995:166). Designated skid trail requirements will be waived if ground-based equipment is allowed on snow.
 - In the winter when average snow depths limits ground surface exposure, operations may occur if:
 - Snow depth is at least 20 inches; or
 - Soils remain frozen to a depth of 6 or more inches.
 - For all mechanical harvester (includes felling and bunching) operations, wide-track vehicles or one-pass operations (one round trip, in and out) will be required.
 - For multiple passes, equipment will walk on 12 inches of slash for equipment greater than 6 pounds per square inch or 8 inches of slash for equipment less than 6 pounds per square inch.
 - No ground-based equipment will be used on fragile soils.
 - Ground-based equipment will be restricted to slopes less than 35 percent.
 - Mechanical harvesting equipment (e.g., excavators, loaders, forwarders, and harvesters) may be used on short pitch slopes of greater than 35 percent but less than 45 percent when necessary to access benches of lower gradient (length determined on a site-specific basis, generally less than 50 feet).

Additionally, if the amount of available slash is not enough or if there is a need to reduce the percent of detrimentally compacted area in the unit, the Authorized Officer may stipulate mechanical decompaction of site-specific areas identified by the resource specialist. Post-harvest assessments will be conducted to determine where sub-soiling is most beneficial to ameliorate compaction and improve soil productivity while minimizing root damage to residual trees.

Treatment of Slash

- Firelines for hand-pile burns will be constructed manually on all slopes greater than 35 percent.
- Fire containment lines will be sufficiently blocked at all access points to preclude off-road vehicles (OHV) use and off-trail hiking. Blocking will include such measures as placing boulders, logs and slash; falling trees less than 8 inches dbh; signing; or other actions as necessary.
- Treatments (including hand-piles) will not occur within 60 feet of springs, seeps, ponds, wetlands, and vernal pools when water is present.
- No mechanical piling will occur.
- Piles will be burned when soil and duff moisture are high.
- No hand-pile burning on fragile slope gradient (FG) and fragile surface erosion (FM) will occur unless there is adequate vegetation between piles to intercept sediment displaced from piles. On FG soils, light piles from upper slope so fire backs into pile wherever possible. Limit hand-piles on slopes that are greater than 65 percent.
- In forest stands, logging slash will be hand-piled outside of the drip lines of leave trees and prior to burning.
- In forest stands, logging slash and fuel loading will be treated to prepare suitable seedbeds for reproduction.

Roads and Landings

- Burning or storing materials (e.g., chips, slash, logs) will not be stored in road ditchlines or on cut slopes above ditchlines.
- If practical, the landings will be blocked sufficiently to preclude vehicle access.
- Road maintenance will not occur during the wet season (generally October 15 through May 15) when the potential for soil erosion and water quality degradation exists. This restriction could be waived under dry conditions and a specific erosion control plan (e.g., rocking, waterbarring, seeding, mulching, barricading). All ground-disturbing activities will be suspended if projected forecasted rain will saturate soils to the extent that there is potential for movement of sediment from the road to wetlands, floodplains or streams. Exposed soils will be covered (e.g., straw mulch or slash) or temporarily stabilized during work suspension.

- All natural surface roads will be closed during the wet season to protect roads from damage and to decrease the potential for off-site sediment movement.

Silviculture

- Snags greater than 16 inches dbh not considered as a safety hazard will be protected and remain standing.
- Sugar pine, Pacific yew, and golden chinkapin will be favored for retention.

Hauling

- Road use will be limited during the wet season on native surface (unsurfaced) roads to between May 15th and Oct 15th. Road use may occur between Oct 15 – Dec 1 and April 1 – May 15 if the road is sufficiently dry to protect both the road and resource values. Road use will be suspended during precipitation events or if monitoring indicates that saturated soils exist to the extent that there is potential for causing elevated stream turbidity and sedimentation. No snow plowing of native surface roads will occur. Consultation with appropriate resource specialists (hydro, soils, fish) will occur if road use is proposed during the wet season to determine if additional mitigation is required or use is appropriate for the conditions.
- Road use is permitted during the wet season on adequately surfaced (aggregate, chip seal, paved) roads as determined by the engineering representative in consultation with a soils or aquatic specialist; however, road use will be suspended when there is potential for causing elevated stream turbidity and sedimentation. Snow plowing is permitted on surfaced roads only, but will occur in a manner that will protect roads and adjacent resources by removing or placing snow berms to prevent concentration on the roadway or on erodible side slopes and soils.
- Water or approved road surface stabilizers/dust control additives will be applied to reduce surfacing material loss and buildup of fine sediment that can enter into waterways. Entry of road surface stabilizers/dust control additives into waterways will be prevented during application.

Oil, Hazardous Materials, and Emergency Response

- During operations, the operator will be required to have a BLM-approved spill plan or other applicable contingency plan. In the event of any release of oil or hazardous substance, as defined in Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 340-142-0005 (9)(d) and (15), into the soil, water, or air, the operator would immediately implement the site's plan. As part of the plan, the operator will be required to have spill containment kits present on the site during operations. The operator will be required to be in compliance with OAR 629-605-0130 of the Forest Practices Act, Compliance with the Rules and Regulations of the Department of Environmental Quality. Notification, removal, transport, and disposal of oil, hazardous substances, and hazardous wastes will be accomplished in accordance with OAR 340-142, Oil and Hazardous Materials Emergency Response Requirements, contained in Oregon Department of Environmental Quality regulations.

- Equipment refueling will be conducted within a confined area outside Riparian Reserves.
- All hazardous materials and petroleum products will be stored in durable containers outside of Riparian Reserves. Equipment containing toxic fluids will not be stored in Riparian Reserves.

Wildlife

- This project will include seasonal operating restrictions for the 120980 unit if chainsaw operations occur within 195 feet of the nest site.
- The BLM will implement seasonal restrictions (March 1 to June 30) for project activities located within one mile of a known den or rendezvous site. The BLM was in communication with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife this season and as of July 13, 2015, there was no evidence of wolves in the Keno Wolf area in the last 4 months. Because these sites are difficult to locate and can change from year to year, this will need to be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the life of this project through annual updates and communication with the Service and ODFW.

Botany

- No harvest, yarding, or other ground-disturbing activities will occur within the plant buffer for *Hackelia bella* (special status species) located in Section 27, T. 38 S., R. 3 E.

Noxious Weeds

- To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, all equipment driven or operated off system roads will be washed prior to entering BLM lands and free of mud and debris.
- Highly disturbed areas such as landings and skid trails will be seeded, re-vegetated, and/or mulched as requested by the resource area botanist. Only certified weed-free mulch and/or native seed will be used.

Cultural Resources

- If, during project implementation, the contractor/workers encounter or becomes aware of any objects or sites of cultural value on federal lands, such as historical or pre-historical ruins, graves, grave markers, or artifacts, the contractor will immediately suspend all operations in the vicinity of the cultural value and notify the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR). The project may be redesigned to protect the cultural resource values present, or evaluation and mitigation procedures will be implemented based on recommendations from the resource area archaeologist and concurrence by the Ashland Field Manager and State Historic Preservation Office.

Recreation

- The sufficient warning signs would be posted to control traffic on major roads used during implementation.

Project Compliance

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin is consistent with the projects described in the 2012 Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project (IVMP) Environmental Assessment (EA), which was prepared under the 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan and the Northwest Forest Plan.

The IVMP EA was developed to provide a tool to accomplish work that promotes healthy and resilient forest landscapes and species conservation, and provides forest products that contribute to the sustainability of local communities and industries. As stated in the IVMP EA (p. 2),

All proposed projects will include a variety of vegetation management treatments designed to attain multiple management objectives identified for various land allocations using an IVM approach. . . . the focus of this programmatic analysis is on potential sets of actions that can be implemented, if and when funding becomes available, and more quickly and efficiently than if each project were analyzed on its own. This EA will not be used strictly for implementation of fuels or silviculture projects; the intent is to implement projects that meet multiple objectives. Projects proposed under the IVM programmatic EA will not overlap any other active NEPA projects; however, they could be part of a larger landscape planning effort, or could be implemented as stand-alone projects. It is expected that decisions under this programmatic EA will create significant management efficiencies.

After the public review period for this EA, it will become available for each of the three Resource Areas (Ashland, Butte Falls, and Grants Pass) to use for specific projects. The Resource Areas will propose and develop individual projects consistent with descriptions and stipulations in this EA. Project specific assessments will be completed prior to project decisions to assure that the effects of the suite of activities proposed under this EA do not exceed the effects disclosed in this EA.

Other Integrated Vegetation Management projects are anticipated to occur across the Medford District. The IVMP does not preclude these other IVM projects that would address a wider variety of activities than are available under this EA and that would be more appropriately analyzed as a stand-alone project. For example, a watershed-wide landscape management project that includes commercial timber harvest, road construction or decommissioning, recreation projects, silviculture treatments, and fuel hazard reduction, as well as IVM treatments, would be more appropriate to analyze as a stand-alone project rather than be implemented under this EA.

The EA details the steps that will be completed prior to signing Decision Records under the IVMP. “Project proposals/draft Decision Records would be written and posted on the Medford District BLM website and available for at least 15 days for public review” (EA, p. 2). Each Resource Area will conduct appropriate outreach for each project. “Following public review, Decision Records would be published for each project under the Forest Management Regulations (43 CFR 5003), and subject to Administrative Remedies in accordance with these regulations (EA, p. 2).” This is one of those project proposals/Decision Records.

This Decision Record (DR) is for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin, which implements the IVMP in the Middle South Fork Little Butte Creek 6th field sub-watershed of the Little Butte Creek 5th field watershed and Upper Jenny Creek 6th field sub-watershed of the Jenny Creek 5th field watershed in the Ashland Resource Area.

All projects implemented under the EA are required to be developed in cooperation with appropriate BLM resource specialists (at a minimal silviculture, forestry, soils, hydrology, wildlife, fisheries, botany, recreation, and fire and fuels) for habitat considerations and treatment options.

- Projects are to be designed in context with other projects in the watersheds in which they are planned.
- Interdisciplinary review (including at minimum, soil scientist/hydrologist) will determine applicable best management practices (BMP) on a project-specific basis.
- Site-specific BMPs are incorporated for each project.

Geographical Information System (GIS) technology is used to estimate acres and produce reference maps. Electronic technology can produce information that appears precise but is still dependent on further field work. All resource information has been reviewed by the resource specialists in the field and unit boundaries have been posted.

Clearance/Survey Type	Date Completed	Specialist Responsible	Reference
Botany—Survey and Manage/Special Status Species	2004 and 2008	Armand Rebisckke	Not Applicable
Botany—T&E, Consultation	This project is not within the range of any federally-listed plant species. There will be no effect on federally-listed plant species.		
Wildlife—Surveys	Not Applicable	Ginelle O’Connor	Not Applicable
Wildlife—Habitat Assessment	Spring 2015	Ginelle O’Connor	Not Applicable
Wildlife Consultation for the Programmatic IVM Project	Not Likely to Adversely Affect northern spotted owls (NSO) and their habitat and complies with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion (01EOW002013I0039_1-29-2013). The project is outside of NSO critical habitat.		
Project-specific Wildlife Consultation	10/28/2015	Ginelle O’Connor	Wildlife Consultation Monitoring Report
Slope Stability Assessment	Not Applicable	Amy Meredith	Timber Production Capability Class
Stream Surveys	1995 and 2002	Tim Montfort	Field surveys and National Hydrography Dataset

Table DR-1. Pre-project Clearances for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin			
Clearance/Survey Type	Date Completed	Specialist Responsible	Reference
Cultural Resources Surveys	7/10/2015	Lisa Rice	Archaeology Report #OR110-16-12
Cultural Resources Consultation	9/28/2015	Lisa Rice	Archaeology Report #OR110-16-12

II. DECISION

It is my decision to implement Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, as described in the *Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM-ORWA-2012-0001-EA).

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin will implement 123 acres of commercial and non-commercial small diameter thinning, small opening creation, and planting with historic tree species in overstocked, previously-managed stands. The Project Area is located on BLM-administered land in Section 27, T. 38 S., R. 3 E. and Section 32, T. 38 S., R. 4 E., W.M.

III. DECISION RATIONALE

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Project conforms to the treatments described for young forest stand management described under Alternative 2 in the IVMP EA (pp. 7-10). Additionally, the project meets the objective for forest health in the Medford District ROD/RMP to reduce tree mortality and restore the vigor, resiliency, and stability of forest stands (ROD/RMP, p.62).

This project has been reviewed by the Ashland Resource Area staff and appropriate Project Design Features (PDFs) will be incorporated into the project. Based on the attached NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Programmatic Environmental Assessment Review, I have determined the Proposed Action involves no significant impact to the human environment and no further environmental analysis is required.

Plan Consistency

Based on the information in the IVMP EA and project record, and comments received from the public regarding this project, I conclude that the decisions documented in this Decision Record are consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan (1995); *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (1994); *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (2001); *Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan* (1998). They are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws

and regulations, and Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice. They will not, per Executive Order 13212, impact energy development, production, supply, and/or distribution.

IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Required cultural surveys were completed for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project. There are no known cultural resource sites located within proposed units. The clearance/tracking form for this project was submitted to the State Historical Preservation Office in September 2015.

The Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Klamath Tribes, Burns Paiute Tribe, Coquille Indian Tribe, and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were invited to participate on issue development and important resource identification during the IVMP EA scoping and the EA's public comment period. Jackson County Commissioners and the Oregon Department of Forestry were also contacted. No responses were received.

Botany Tails #01EOFW00-2014-I-0013

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project is not within the range of any federally-listed plant species; therefore, there will be no effect on federally-listed plant species.

Wildlife Final-IVM_Informal_01EOFW002013I0039_1-29-2013

The majority (84 of 114 acres) of the project units are in locations that are not considered northern spotted (NSO) owl habitat (capable). In the 30 acres of treatment where dispersal-only habitat would occur within NSO habitat, the treatments would treat and maintain the habitat type and would retain the same functionality post-treatment because only small diameter material and understory/mid-story components would be removed. Three of the 30 acres is in an NSO core, while 27 acres are in a NSO home range. A minimum of 40 percent canopy cover would be retained. No nesting, roosting, foraging (NRF) habitat would be treated in the project. None of the treatment units occur in designated NSO Critical Habitat units and therefore, would have no effect to any designated NSO Critical Habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project May Affect, but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA) northern spotted owls because the project will follow NLAA standards described on pages 34-40 of the Medford IVM Biological Assessment (BA) and the Project Design Criteria of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion.

V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement for the IVMP EA began on November 14, 2011 with the mailing of a scoping letter to approximately 660 residents and landowners near or adjacent to BLM parcels within the planning area; federal, state, and county agencies; tribes; private organizations; and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type.

The BLM held a public meeting on January 19, 2012 and also gathered information through questionnaires, personal discussions, and comment letters, which provided public input to BLM for consideration in the IVMP EA. Extensive discussions with individuals interested in the project were held throughout the planning process.

A formal 30-day public comment period was provided for the EA during August and September 2012. The public was notified of this via a newspaper notice and letters to individuals, Tribes, organizations, and government entities who expressed a wish to continue to be informed about the project.

A Draft Decision Record for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project was posted on the Medford District's ePlanning website (<http://1.usa.gov/1NlrPuT>) on December 15, 2015 for a 15-day public review. No written comments were received. Following the public review, a Notice of Decision will be published Medford's *Mail Tribune* newspaper. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided in accordance with 43 CFR § 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the *Medford Mail Tribune* will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

This decision is a Forest Management Decision. Administrative remedies are available to persons who believe that they will be adversely affected by this decision. A protest may be filed within 15 days of the publication of a Notice of Decision in Medford's *Mail Tribune* newspaper.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulations 43 CFR §5003.2 (a & c), the effective date of this decision, as it pertains to actions which are *not* part of an advertised timber sale is the date of publication of a Notice of Decision in Medford's *Mail Tribune*. Any protest must be made within 15 days of the publication of Notice of Decision in Medford's *Mail Tribune*. Any contest of this decision should state specifically which portion or element of the decision is being protested and cite the applicable regulations.

43 CFR § 5003.3 subsection (b) states: "Protests shall be filed with the authorized officer and shall contain a written statement of reasons for protesting the decision." This precludes the acceptance of electronic mail (email) or facsimile (fax) protests. Only written and signed hard copies of protests delivered to the Medford District Office will be accepted. The Medford District Office is located at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, Oregon.

If no protest is received by the close of business (4:30 p.m.) within 15 days after publication of the Notice of Decision, the decision will become final. If a timely protest is received, the project decision will be reconsidered in light of the statement of reasons for the protest and other pertinent information available, and the Ashland Resource Area will issue a protest decision.



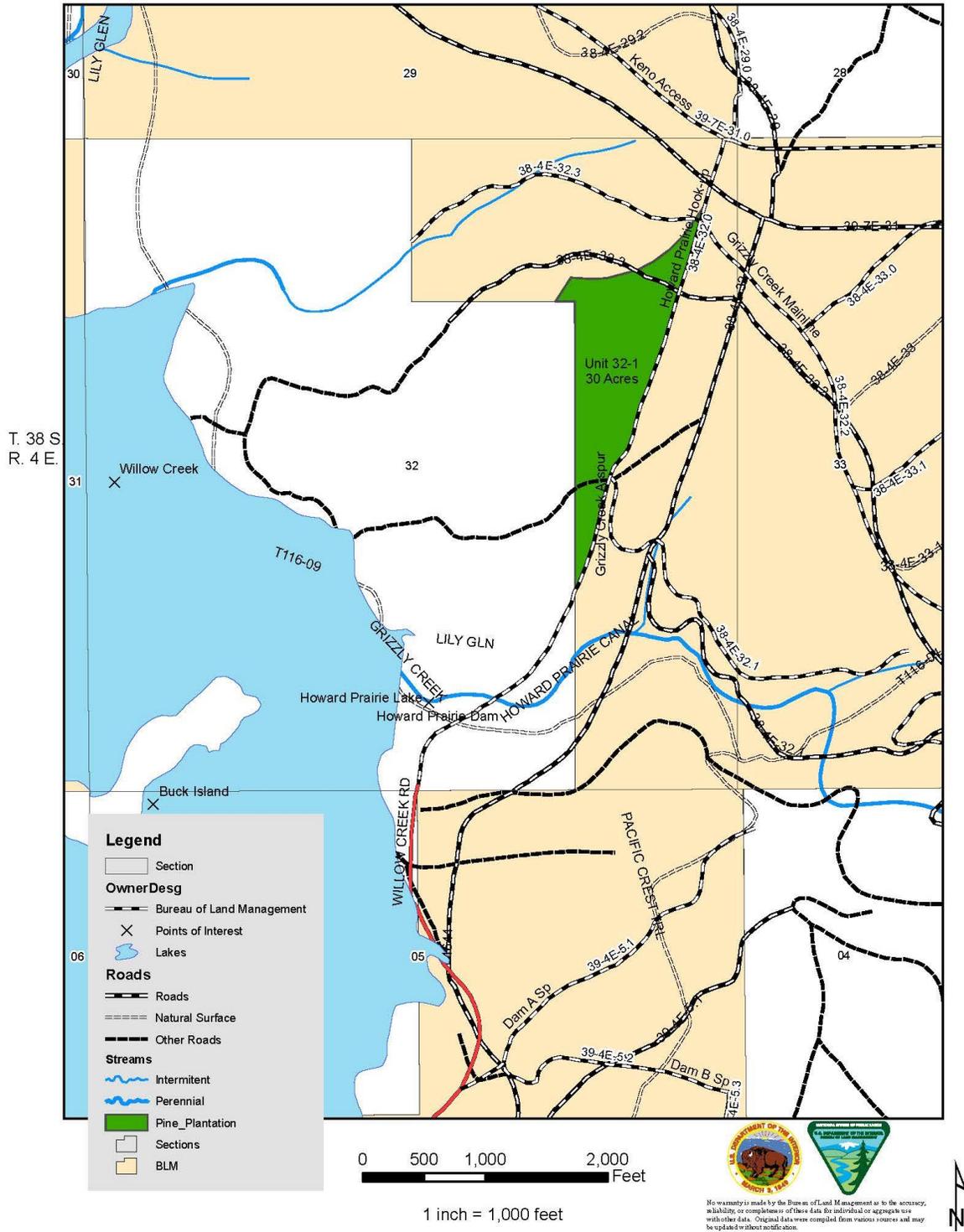
John Gerritsma
Field Manager
Ashland Resource Area

1-7-16

Date

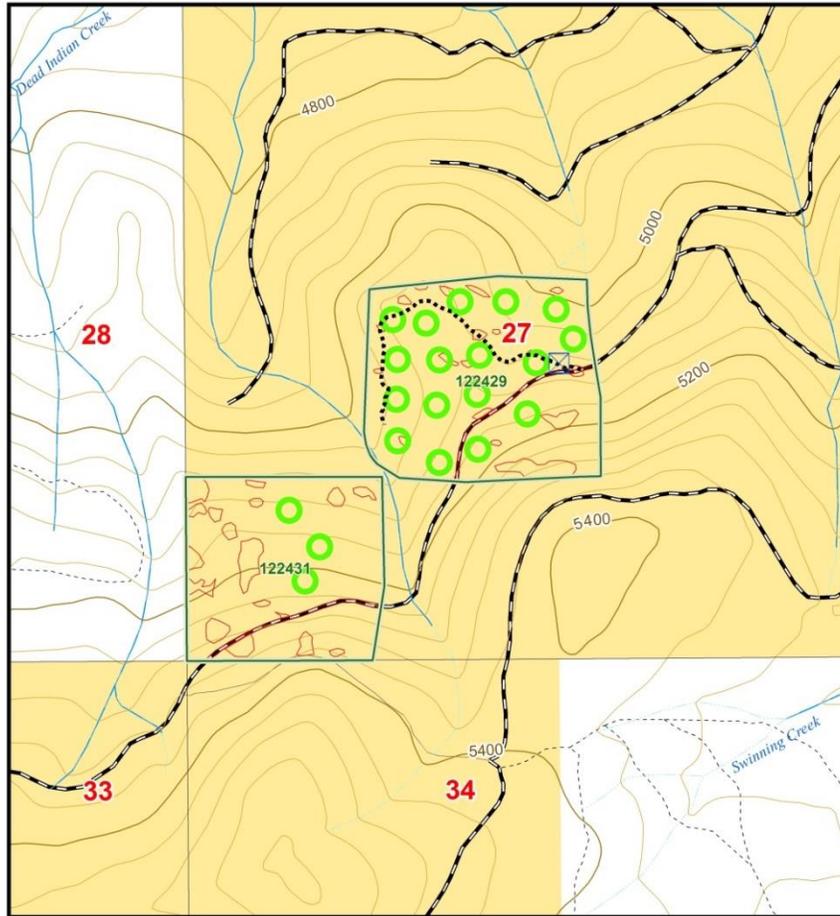
Map 1

Unit 120980 Treatment Area



Map 2

T38S 3E S.27



No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources and may be updated without notification.



Greensprings / Buck Quarry

OI: 122431, 122429

Acres: 52 + 41 = 93

Prescription- Create Group select openings 1/2 acre in size (83 ft radius).

Group Select centers marked on ground with yellow flagging.

Natural/Road openings- 9 acres

Group Selects-10 acres

Legend

- Barricade
 - Access Road
 - FOI - OI Number
 - Group Selects
 - Natural Openings
- Streams**
- Perennial
 - Intermittent
 - Ephemeral
- Roads - Owner Designation**
- Bureau of Land Management
 - County route
 - Forest Service
 - Other state route
 - Municipal route (urban, residential, etc.)
 - Private road (no symbol)
 - Not Known
- Ownership**
- Bureau of Land Management
 - Private Individual or Company

Appendix A. Integrated Vegetation Management Project EA Public Comment Summary and Response

Six comment letters were received from organizations and individuals. These are summarized with responses below. All changes or clarifications made to the proposal as a result of comments are italicized.

Programmatic NEPA

Comment: Request for 30-day comment period prior to signing decisions

Response: While a 30-day comment period was requested, it is felt that most projects will be relatively small, and a 15-day review period of the draft decision before it is signed would be sufficient. Additionally, the 15-day period is the minimum and individual field managers may choose to extend the review period based on the complexity and level of public interest anticipated in the project. Following the signing of the decision and publication of the decision notice in the paper, each project is subject to protest (see EA Appendix E, Pre-project Clearances and DR).

Comment: Plan and evaluate projects on a site-specific basis. Include maps in Decision Records. Make it a requirement to produce individual maps of proposed treatment units in the Decision documentation posted or sent to the public.

Response: Site specific assessment would be done for each project by reviewing existing records, field reconnaissance, field surveys, and assessment to determine if potential impacts fall within the scope of effects disclosed in the EA. A review of potential wildlife habitat, including RA32 habitat identification, would be conducted using maps, aerial photographs, Micro*Storms computer data, GIS data, and/or stand exam records (EA pp. 82, 161). *Project maps will be included in Decision Records.* All required surveys would be completed for each project.

Comment: Include an implementation monitoring program for projects.

Response: Every project completed under contract will be monitored to assure compliance with the EA and with the contract by a contract administrator.

Additionally, in an effort to determine whether the programmatic approach is practical and can be continued or expanded in the future, at a minimum, 10% of each project will be field reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Team responsible for planning and implementing the project. When practical, in addition to IDT member participation, an invitation may be extended to key publics, interested stakeholders, and third-party reviewers. This field review will help determine:

- 1) Was the project implemented as described in the Decision Record?
 - Was integration accomplished?
 - Project design
 - Implementation

- Were objectives met?
 - o Ecological
 - o Economic
- Were efficiencies gained?
 - o Funding
 - o Contracting Methods

2) How can improvements be made in the future?

Monitoring will occur in each project to varying levels. Every project completed under contract is monitored to assure compliance with the EA and with the contract by a contract administrator. Other monitoring will be done under annual project monitoring for the Resource Management Plan (RMP). Some projects will be monitored through the District fire monitoring and others will receive additional monitoring under resource area direction as time and funding allows. The intent is to monitor to a level necessary to determine whether the programmatic approach is practical and can be continued or expanded in the future.

Landscape

Comment: Identify one or more 5th field watershed for intensive treatment and treat 2% of the watershed annually.

Response: The IVMP EA was developed to increase planning efficiency and to allow each Resource Area to treat areas identified for multiple restoration objectives. While this could be a viable use of the EA, and this could be accomplished as a District strategy, the intent is to provide a tool for all three Resource Areas to implement restoration actions in a timelier manner than if planned separately. This approach would likely be more appropriate for a landscape-level project that incorporates a wider variety of treatments than are available under this EA.

Comment: Keep projects confined to single watersheds

Response: This comment recognized that strategic treatments along ridges could overlap more than one watershed. In any case, beyond strategic ridgeline treatments, it is expected that most projects would be contained within single watershed boundaries.

Ecology: Vegetation Prescriptions

Comment: Do not remove trees >20 inches dbh; maintain all legacy trees >150 years; maintain all large legacy broad-leaved trees; removal of large trees should not be favored outside of legacy tree culturing. White fir up to 25 inches dbh in the dripline of *Pinus spp.* may be appropriate to cut.

Response: Dry forest prescriptions retain all fire-tolerant species >20 inches dbh and all other species >25 inches dbh (EA p. 11); Legacy Tree Culturing retains all live trees >30 inches except white/grand fir which may be girdled and retained as snags. Trees of this size would not be removed until coarse woody debris standards have been met at the site (e.g., EA pp. 8, 63-64,

82). All trees >150 years old would be retained (see EA p. 12, Legacy Tree Culturing in Dry Forests). *All decisions that authorize removal of any trees >20 inches dbh will provide a specific rationale for why removal of these trees is ecologically appropriate.*

Comment: Mark all trees for removal or leave; do not allow contractors to determine what trees would be cut.

Response: We have a marking contract on the District, which could contribute to increased implementation efficiency, one of the objectives of this EA. We also use “designation by prescription” or “designation by description” for stewardship or thinning projects. However, it should be noted that these contracts are closely monitored and inspected to assure conformance with marking guidelines.

Comment: Retain broad-leaved trees >4 inches dbh. The single-stem and oak cluster treatment are unclear on limits on the competing vegetation to be removed.

Response: Prescriptions would retain hardwoods greater than 16 inches dbh (EA p. 12). Diameter of retention trees in Oak Woodlands and Savannah (EA p. 15-18) is based on the latest science and meeting primarily ecological, and some social objectives (e.g. fire threat reduction) (EA p 16). Single-step treatments retain all larger oaks and oak cluster treatments retain live stems that, “are >1/5 the dbh of the largest stem...” (EA p. 17). Setting an arbitrary limit on the diameter of trees could prevent attaining objectives for these vegetation types.

Comment: Maintain at least 50% in shrub patches, fragmenting large patches into smaller patches to reduce fuels continuity. Chaparral treatments should be very focused on the structure-ignition zone. Consider seasonal burning that won’t disrupt nesting cycles.

Response: Treatments in both meadows and in chaparral shrublands will leave a minimum of 25% of untreated shrub patches (EA pp. 18 and 19). The intent is to leave $\geq 25\%$ of existing shrubs in patches; leaving more than this in meadows may not achieve meadow restoration objectives. Chaparral shrublands treatments would be prioritized in WUI or to meet wildlife habitat objectives. Leaving 50% or more in shrub patches may not meet fuel hazard reduction objectives to protect homes or other resources, or may not meet wildlife objectives. Project-specific retention will be made on site-specific objectives (EA p. 5).

Comment: Gap size and shape should be based on historic reference. Keep gap size small and ensure there is variability in prescriptions.

Response: Gap size would be based on stand conditions and the gap design would be developed to attain project objectives. Most stands would be treated with variable density thinning in which small gaps would be created to increase the diversity of biotic communities (EA p. 13). Maximum gap size is 1 acre and most created gaps would be smaller, generally ranging from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in size (EA p. 10).

Comment: Thinning moist forests >80 years old.

Response: Moist forest stands targeted for treatment are those stands between 60 years and 120 years, and averaging ≤ 20 inches dbh that are even-aged, and lacking structural and species diversity (EA p.13). Moist forest treatments are designed to accelerate habitat diversity and heterogeneity in non-complex stands and treatments would be applied to meet these ecological objectives. Moist forest treatments are designed to enhance late seral species habitat and variable density thinning has been shown to increase vertical heterogeneity and to provide small openings for shrub and hardwood diversity. Treatment in moist forests is also supported by the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Action 5 from the 2011 Revised Recovery Plan. The recovery plan also recommends thinning of older plantations if they are not currently suitable habitat and if treatments would accelerate the development of suitable owl habitat.

Comment: The "ecological anchors" list should be open-ended. Talus area might be another good place to use as anchors.

Response: We concur, and had intended the list included in the IVMP EA (pp. 11,14, 15) to function as a guideline, not a comprehensive list, and the EA language should reflect that "Ecological anchors include, *but are not limited to* the following:"

Comment: Numerical target for post-treatment SDI and meeting objectives for variability.

Response: Post SDI targets are set at a minimum of >30% or >35%. SDI targets will be set above the minimum depending on site specific conditions, objectives and other considerations. In dry forest prescriptions, the groups would have varying densities that will result in a range of SDI targets. In moist forest prescriptions, the SDI would be set appropriately to meet stand objectives. Creation of groups and gaps (EA pp. 9–10, 12) would also create in-stand variability.

Comment: Early-successional forests in the District are prevalent on the landscape.

Response: The EA proposal does not include creation of early-successional forest.

Comment: Treatment in Riparian Reserves. Concerns over removing shade. No removal of trees >12 inches dbh within 1 site-potential tree of streams; expand no-treatment to "variable width Ecological Protection Zones (p. 4 of comments). Non-commercial fall –and-leave of trees 12-20 inches dbh might be appropriate under certain circumstances such as to culture legacy oaks and pines. Leave all trees providing shade to streams and any trees that could offer wood recruitment.

Response: Treatment within Riparian Reserves would be designed to meet Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives (EA pp. 5, 22) and no trees larger than 20 inches dbh would be removed from Riparian Reserves (EA p. 7). Tree removal would only occur after large wood requirements are met (e.g., EA pp. 8, 10, 11, 12, 18, 62). Additionally, no harvest or yarding equipment would be permitted within the first site-potential tree (EA p. 24), no treatment would occur within the primary shade zone of streams, variable depending on site-specific conditions, and there would be no removal of hardwood species (EA p. 27). Prescribed burning ignition

would not occur within 50 feet of streams (EA p. 28), but would be allowed to back into reserves, creating a mosaic burn characteristic of natural fire.

Comment: Sediment reduction and disconnecting roads from the stream network.

Response: There are extensive project design features in the EA that address sediment production and transport, and water quality for each action that are intended to prevent sediment reaching streams (EA pp. 24-29). Additional actions such as closing non-system roads are outside the scope of this project.

Wildlife

Comment: Canopy cover for NSO habitat and activity near NSO nest sites.

Response: The canopy cover outlined in the EA reflect those levels appropriate for the Ecoregion (Watershed Professionals Network (WPN) 2001, p. A-25-A-227) and/or the necessary cover needed to maintain Northern Spotted Owl habitat (EA p. 82) per the 2010 Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl Recovery.

Comment: Spring prescribed burning effects on nesting birds, pond turtles, and other animals, and soils.

Response: Potential impacts to wildlife and soils through the application of prescribed fire have been considered and addressed in the IVMP EA Project Design Features (EA p. 26 & 30). There is a narrow window of operation for prescribed burning in southwest Oregon; therefore, there may be some spring burning. Effects on these resource are addressed in the EA (e.g., pp. 94-95 for land birds; and pp. 63-66 for soils). Site-specific project design would ensure that PDFs would be implemented to protect pond turtles and other species from project activities (EA pp. 30-32).

Comment: Treatment of noxious weeds

Response: Noxious weeds would be treated under the *Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* (EA #OR-110-98-14) (EA p. 101).

Comment: Road or landing construction

Response: Extensive road construction is not anticipated under this EA; however, road construction is allowed under this EA if necessary for extraction of timber products. It is anticipated that ecological benefits would outweigh effects of temporary road construction. Any road constructed or reopened would be built to minimal standards, and decommissioned or obliterated after use.

Comment: Include road decommissioning as part of projects.

Response: All routes opened or constructed during project activities would be obliterated or decommissioned following project completion (EA pp. 22-23). Decommissioning of additional roads is outside the scope of this project.

Comment: Concerns with smoke impacts.

Response: The Oregon Department of Forestry Smoke Management Plan addresses the issue of public health and welfare and the use of plastic to cover piles. Under this authority the State Forester coordinates the administration and operation of the plan. The Forester also issues additional restrictions on prescribed burning in situations where air quality of the entire State or part thereof is, or would likely become adversely affected by smoke.

The Medford District identifies geographic areas and communities that may be impacted smoke emissions from prescribed burning and issues press releases before each active burn season in the Fall/Winter and Spring burning periods through local media.

The Medford District provides daily planned prescribed burning information through two sources. The first is an Oregon wide website that can be found at <http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/fire/prescribedburns> and through the prescribed burning 24 hour phone line at 1-800-267-3126. Both systems give detailed information of planned burns for the next day including legal description, acres to be burned and expected emissions measured in tons per acre.

Air quality concerns have led to prohibitions on the open burning of household plastics in many areas of the country. "Inasmuch as regions in Oregon where silvicultural burning occurs are exposed to significant amounts of precipitation, there is an overall emissions reduction benefit from covering silvicultural piles. Polyethylene does not include chlorinated compounds or significant amounts of other chemicals likely to form uniquely toxic emissions, nor have these been demonstrated in the literature" (Wrobel and Reinhart, 2003).

OAR 629-048-0210(2), Best Burn Practices; Emission Reduction Techniques, states, ". . . best burn practices involve methods that ensure the most rapid and complete combustion of forest fuels . . ." Covering of hand-piles is a "Best Burn Practice." OAR 629-048-0210(4) states, "When covers will not be removed and thus will be burned along with the piled forest fuels, the covers must not consist of materials prohibited under OAR 340-264-0060(3), except that polyethylene sheeting that complies with the following may be used: a) Only polyethylene may be used. All other plastics are prohibited."

An addendum to the original Wrobel and Reinhart literature review (2003) on the use of polyethylene sheeting to enhance combustion efficiency, discusses the rules affecting polyethylene (PE) burning. Oregon has addressed the issue based on the findings reported by Wrobel and Reinhart (2003). "The available literature does not support a contention that burning polyethylene (PE) sheeting would produce unique chemicals or classes of chemicals that are not also found in emissions from burning wood debris" (Wrobel and Reinhart 2003).

Comment: Concern over multiple entries and multiple passes of heavy equipment.

Response: Integrating treatments and increasing efficiency is a primary objective of the IVMP EA. We anticipate that this EA will provide opportunities for Resource Areas to accomplish more integrated treatments and entries; projects will be implemented to reduce multiple entries and multiple passes to the extent practicable.

Comment: Tree planting and diversity of early seral vegetation. Any tree planting should be sparse and variable. Try to enhance complex early seral habitat by allowing and tolerating diverse early seral vegetation and relatively slow conifer establishment/dominance.

Response: In many of these forested and woodland communities heterogeneity, species diversity and a mixture of seral stages are all treatment objectives. Complex early seral habitat will be enhanced through retention of natural openings and expansion of gaps to sustain native shrubs and other early seral vegetation. Planting would be used when there is little to no natural regeneration, early seral species such as pine or oak are lacking, there is a need for particular species for habitat objectives, or there is a need to reduce nonnative species through shading (EA pp. 9, 10, 12, 16).

Comment: Focus fuel reduction near residences and well-traveled roads. Further from roads, focus on restoring ecosystems and natural processes. Lop and scatter fuels rather than burn.

Response: One primary objective of this EA is to foster and create integrated projects that satisfy multiple objectives and steer away from treatments implemented under a singular objective, such as hazardous fuels reduction alone. Additional objectives for this programmatic assessment include increasing spatial heterogeneity, species diversity, and overall habitat and forest variability indicative of mixed-severity fire regimes. The application of fire inherently results in variability, due to its dynamic nature and response to varied topographic, fuel and weather conditions. Under burning typically results in a mosaic of burn severities, where some fuels are burned hot and others go unburned.

The pile sizes indicated in the EA are a maximum, not all piles will adhere to these specifications and due to human construction and diversity of fuels, no two piles are exactly the same. The suggestions for varied ways to treat fuels are welcome, but dictation of how to enforce contract specification is outside of the scope of this EA. Projects completed under the IVMP EA have the potential to generate numerous fuels >3", particularly from thinning sapling trees. Lop and scatter of all fuels >3" would have the potential to increase the surface fuel loading by shifting the arrangement of fuels through the conversion of ladder fuels to surface fuels, This action would increase the continuity and loading of surface fuels, and thus potential fire behavior rates of spread, flame length and residence time, which would reduce the resiliency of the stand in a wildfire event.

Comment: Use of stewardship authority for wood extraction and receipts for restoration

Response: One of the IVMP objectives is to improve efficiencies and enhance the local economy. Dictation of the tools to implement and accomplish specific projects is outside of the scope of this EA. Additionally, unlike the U.S. Forest Service stewardship authority, BLM receipts are not obligated to restoration.

Comment: Connection between IVM silvicultural objectives and timber sale projects.

Response: One of the potential tools available for implementation of IVM projects is the extraction of thinned saw log material through ground-based or cable-based means (EA p.7, 19-20). The IVM project would not replace timber sale planning; however, it is expected that commercial forest products and biomass would be byproducts of restoration treatments.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD INTERAGENCY OFFICE
3040 BIDDLE ROAD
MEDFORD, OREGON 97504

PROGRAMMATIC INTEGRATED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PROJECT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT NEPA# DOI-BLM-ORWA-2012-0001-EA

I. INTRODUCTION

The Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has analyzed integrated vegetation management activities for forest stands located across the Medford District. BLM's interdisciplinary planning team designed the Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Project (IVMP) on the Medford District based on current resource conditions in the project area, and to meet the objectives and direction of the 1995 Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (1995 ROD/RMP). The proposals presented and evaluated in the IVMP Environmental Assessment (NEPA # DOI-BLM-ORWA-2012-0001-EA) reflect what the planning team believes to be the best balance of resource conditions, resource potential, and competing management objectives. Integrated vegetation management projects authorized under Decision Records will be limited to a maximum of 5,000 acres per year and dispersed across the District. No more than 10 percent of BLM land in a 5th field watershed will be treated under this EA in any one year.

Currently, the BLM proposes to implement 123 acres of commercial and non-commercial small diameter thinning, small opening creation, and planting with historic tree species in overstocked, previously-managed stands of the Ashland Resource Area through the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project.

II. BACKGROUND

The general planning area for implementation of projects under the IVMP covers lands managed by the Medford District BLM. Lands within the area are a "checkerboard" of federal, private, county, and state ownership totaling approximately 3 million acres. Of those lands, approximately 860,000 acres are lands under the administration of the BLM. These lands are in a variety of land use allocations (e.g., Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA), Matrix, Late-Successional Reserve (LSR)).

The BLM began public outreach for this project on November 14, 2011 by sending a scoping letter to approximately 660 residents and landowners near or adjacent to BLM parcels within the planning area; federal, state, and county agencies; tribal governments; private organizations; and individuals that requested information concerning projects of this type. All public input was

considered by the planning and interdisciplinary team in developing the proposals and in preparing the EA.

The BLM held a public meeting on January 19, 2012, and gathered information through questionnaires, personal discussions, and comment letters, which provided public input to BLM for consideration in the EA.

The EA analyzed treatments of vegetation communities that are not generally viable for commercial timber sales, but exhibit an ecological need (e.g., habitat restoration, enhanced structural complexity, improved forest stand growth and vigor, reduced risk of catastrophic wildfires). The project proposes a variety of activities to address the purpose and need for the project, such as treatments for restoration of oak woodlands, meadows, shrublands, and grasslands.

The IVMP EA was available for public review from August 25 through September 25, 2012. It incorporated analysis of the proposed actions and addressed issues raised in public scoping comments. During the public review period, the BLM received six comment letters, mainly in support of the project, but expressing several concerns. For a summary of public comments, see Appendix A, Public Comment Summary and Response.

In designing the IVMP to address current resource conditions, the BLM interdisciplinary team was aware of and sensitive to the public's range of views and values while complying with a variety of resource management mandates. As a result, the IVMP is an integrated and multi-faceted plan that balances these factors and objectives.

III. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BLM completed consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the activities addressed in this project (Final-IVM_Informal_01EOFW002013I0039_1-29-2013). The project would treat and maintain 30 acres of dispersal-only habitat and would retain same functionality post-treatment because only small-diameter material and understory / mid-story components would be removed. Three of the 30 acres is in NSO core, while 27 acres are in NSO home range. No nesting, roosting, foraging (NRF) habitat would be treated in the project. None of the treatment units occur in designated NSO Critical Habitat units and would have no effect to any designated NSO Critical Habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project May Affect, but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA) spotted owls because the project will follow NLAA standards described on pages 34-40 of the Medford IVM Biological Assessment (BA) and the Project Design Criteria of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion.

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Project is not within the range of any federally-listed plant species. There will be no effect on federally-listed plant species.

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project is not expected to affect Southern Oregon/Northern California (SONCC) species or their critical habitat since there are no activities proposed in fish-bearing streams.

Cultural surveys were completed for this project. There are no known cultural resource sites located within proposed units. If cultural resources are located during the implementation of an action, the project would be redesigned to protect the values present.

The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Siletz, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, Burns Paiute Tribe, Klamath Tribes, and Coquille Indian Tribe were notified of this project during scoping. The Jackson County Commissioners and Jackson County Forestry, Commissioners, and Public Works were also contacted. The BLM did not receive responses from these groups.

IV. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

A. Plan Conformance

Based on the information in the Integrated Vegetation Management Project EA and project record, and from the letters and comments received from the public about the project, I conclude that this project is in conformance with the 1995 Medford District RMP and subsequent plan amendments that include:

1. Medford District Noxious Weed Environmental Assessment (1998).
2. Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994).
3. Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (NWFP) (1994).
4. Final SEIS for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2000), and the ROD and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001). This project utilizes the December 2003 Survey and Manage species list. This list incorporates species changes and removals made as a result of the 2001, 2002, and 2003 Annual Species Reviews (ASRs) with the exception of the red tree vole.

The ACS Consistency Review found that the project is in compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy as originally developed under the NWFP.

This decision is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act; Native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice; and Executive Order 13212 regarding potential adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply, and/or distribution.

B. Finding of No Significant Impact

I have considered the intensity of the impacts anticipated from the projects analyzed under Alternative 2 in the IVMP EA relative to each of the 10 areas suggested by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

1) Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.

The BLM included Project Design Features (PDFs) in the proposed actions for the purpose of reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts that might otherwise stem from project implementation. There are no significant effects expected from project activities.

The following is a synopsis of the effects expected from implementation of activities analyzed under Alternative 2 for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project:

Overall, stand heterogeneity, species diversity, creation and maintenance of structure, and retention of large trees would increase. Thinning that reduces stand density in dry forests would reduce the susceptibility to insect and disease epidemics by increasing individual tree resiliency (EA p. 47).

There is no expectation that effects to fisheries would occur due to the project design, application of PDFs, and all activities occurring outside of Riparian Reserves. There would be no reduction in streamside shade and, therefore, no increase in water temperature. The potential for large, in-stream wood recruitment would not be reduced. Riparian Reserves, slash, untreated areas, and canopy retention would prevent any changes to peak flows or water temperature, and prevent sediment from traveling off treated units due to the lack of hydrologic connectivity. These PDFs should prevent or minimize impacts to an inconsequential level (EA p. 81).

The BLM completed surveys for Special Status plants and would protect sites from direct and indirect effects through buffers or PDFs.

Proposed treatments would not contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the District because of the use of PDFs, and ongoing weed treatments (EA p. 107).

PDFs would prevent any direct and indirect effects to identified cultural resources. Tribal consultation would reduce the potential for negative effects to tribally significant resources (EA pp. 126-127).

See Section 9 below for a discussion of species listed or proposed to be listed as federally Endangered or Threatened Species and their designated critical habitat.

2) The degree of the impact on public health or safety.

The project has not been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety.

The burning of hand-piles “would conform to the Oregon Smoke Management Program (OAR 629-048-0001 through 629-048-0500). All burning activities would comply with the national ambient air quality standards for particulates (PM 10 and PM 2.5) (EA p. 116).”

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.*

The Medford District encompasses a variety of areas with unique characteristics. Site-specific PDFs tailored to the characteristics of the site and incorporated into project activities would preclude adverse effects to these areas.

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

The effects of this project are similar to those of many other projects implemented within the scope of the RMP and NWFP. There is a continuing full range of debate, findings, and opinions about the potential effects of such land management activities. It underscores a level of uncertainty that exists in assessing the changes that may occur as a result of such projects. Any uncertainty in actual effects is acknowledged by the EISs (e.g., FEIS/PRMP pp. 4-7; 4-24; 4-73; 4-79; 4-98) to which the IVMP EA is tiered, and in the EA (pp. 131, 133) regarding climate change. Opposition to the project is not the same as “controversial effects.” The Ninth Circuit has held that a project is “highly controversial” if there is a “substantial dispute [about] the size, nature, or effect of the major Federal action rather than the existence of opposition to a use.” Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Blackwood, 161 F.3d 1208, 1212 (9th Cir. 1998) (quoting Sierra Club v. U.S. Forest Service, 843 F.2d 1190, 1193 (9th Cir. 1988)).

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

The analysis does not show that this action will involve any unique or unknown risks.

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.*

The action and the decision will not set any precedents for future actions with significant effects. While the programmatic approach is different from many projects, the EA authorizes projects that are similar to other projects designed to implement the RMP and NWFP.

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

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified. Since this is a programmatic EA, individual interdisciplinary teams would assess proposed projects in light of other projects in the area to assure that no significant cumulative effects would occur from implementation.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.*

There are no sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would the Proposed Action cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Cultural surveys were completed for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project. There are no known cultural resource sites located within proposed units. If cultural resources are located during the implementation of an action, the project would be redesigned to protect the values present.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.*

The Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Project is outside the range of any federally-listed Threatened and Endangered plant species. There would be no effect on these species as a result of implementing this project.

The project would treat and maintain 30 acres of northern spotted owl (NSO) dispersal-only habitat and would retain same functionality post-treatment because treatments would be limited to removing small-diameter material and understory / mid-story components. Three of the 30 acres are in a NSO core area, while 27 acres are in the NSO home range. No nesting, roosting, foraging (NRF) habitat would be treated in the project. None of the treatment units occur in designated NSO Critical Habitat units; therefore, there would be no effect to this habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has determined the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project May Affect, but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA) spotted owls because the project will follow NLAA standards described on pages 34-40 of the Medford IVM Biological Assessment (BA) and the Project Design Criteria of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion (01E0FW002013I0039_1-29-2013).

Pacific fisher are in the vicinity of the project area as well as foraging habitat. Since the release of the Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management EA, the USFWS issued a proposal to list the West Coast Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of fisher as a Threatened species under the ESA (79 FR 194:60419-60425). The BLM reviewed the Draft Species Report³ and other materials relating to the proposal and determined the analysis in the EA (p. 92-93) for the Pacific fisher and its habitat is still valid. The project will not contribute to the need to federally list the fisher as Threatened or Endangered because denning or resting sites would not be removed. Even when combined with past, present, or other future foreseeable projects, the proposed actions would not preclude fishers from dispersing through or reproducing within the Medford District. The project would not affect persistence of fishers in the watershed.

The gray wolf is a federally-listed species in Oregon west of highways 395 and 78. Until 2011, gray wolves were only known to occur in Oregon east of these highways. The project is within the updated known wolf activity of the Keno Area identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) in January 2015. The BLM was in communication with ODFW this season and as of July 13, 2015, there was no evidence of wolves in the Keno Wolf area in the last 4 months. Prior to each spring turnout season, communication between USFWS, ODFW, and the BLM would occur to determine if any wolf activity has expanded or moved into the Project Area. ODFW would contact the BLM if wolf activity is in the Project Area to determine specific application of ODFW's Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (2011). The State wolf conservation plan includes management strategies to minimize potential negative interactions between wolves and forest management activities. Effects from this project are not expected because activities would not disturb key wolf areas such as den sites and rendezvous sites, would not change prey availability, and would not increase public access in the area known to be used for denning and rendezvous sites. No effects from disturbance are expected at this time, but would need to be assessed on an ongoing basis throughout the life of the proposed project.

³ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Draft Species Report, Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*), West Coast Population. January 13, 2014, www.fws.gov/cno/es/fisher

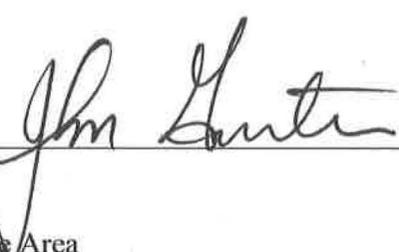
10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.*

There is no indication this project would result in actions that would threaten a violation of any environmental laws.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on information in the EA and comments received from the public, it is my determination that implementation of Alternative 2 for the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Thin Project would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of effects addressed by the Environmental Impact Statements for the Medford District RMP (1995) and the NWFP or are otherwise not significant. Thus, the Greensprings and Buck Quarry Pine Plantation Project does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment and an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This conclusion is based on my consideration of the CEQ's criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27) regarding context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA and on my understanding of the project. As noted above, the analysis of effects has been completed within the context of the Medford District RMP and it is consistent with that plan and the scope of effects anticipated from that plan. The analysis of effects has also occurred in the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales as appropriate for different types of impacts.


John Gerritsma
Field Manager
Ashland Resource Area

1-4-16

Date