



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE
ASHLAND RESOURCE AREA
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504



DECISION RECORD #3
For the
PILOT THOMPSON PROJECT
(DOI-BLM-OR-M060-2013-0003-REA)

INTRODUCTION

I previously made a decision to implement a modified version of Alternative 2, consisting of timber harvest and follow-up pre-commercial thinning/fuels reduction treatments, temporary road construction, road renovation, road maintenance, and the decommissioning of a selection of roads identified in the Pilot Thompson Project Revised EA. I made a 2nd decision to implement the decommissioning of 0.88 miles roads that were identified and analyzed in the Revised EA. I am now making a third decision to implement 921 acres of fuels reduction treatments.

This document describes my decision, and reasons for my decision, regarding the selection of a course of action to be implemented for the Pilot Thompson Project. The Revised Environmental Assessment (REA) for the Pilot Thompson Project (DOI-BLM-OR-M060-2013-0003-REA) documented the environmental analysis conducted to estimate the site-specific effects on the human environment that may result from the implementation of the Pilot Thompson proposal. The Pilot Thompson EA was originally issued for public review on February 21, 2013. The EA public review period ended on April 26, 2013. In response to Interdisciplinary Team and public comments received during the original Pilot Thompson EA review period, a revision of the Environmental Assessment was completed and posted to the Medford District website (<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/plans/index.php>) and the Pilot's website (<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/forestrypilot/pilot-projects.php>) on August 1, 2013.

BACKGROUND

In December 2010, the Secretary of the Interior designated Forestry Pilot Demonstration Projects in the Medford, Roseburg, and Coos Bay BLM Districts in southwest Oregon to demonstrate the application of principles of restoration developed by Drs. Jerry F. Franklin and K. Norman Johnson (*Applying Restoration Principles on the BLM O&C Forests in Southwest Oregon (2010)*). In collaboration with Drs. Franklin and Johnson, the BLM's goal was to demonstrate how the Franklin/Johnson forest restoration principles can provide both ecological and economic benefits.

The Medford BLM chose to implement the Middle Applegate Watershed Pilot in separate phases; each phase focuses on a sub-watershed (or group of sub-watersheds) within the 5th field Middle Applegate River Watershed. Planning for the first phase of the pilot, called the Pilot Joe Demonstration Project, was completed in 2011. The Pilot Thompson Project is the second phase of the secretarial pilot.

The Pilot Thompson Project was designed to treat 2,354 to 2,720 acres of Dry Forest vegetation using various commercial and non-commercial forest management methods. The ecological forestry project will be achieved by implementing a series of forest prescriptions that define the size of material, the species and the conditions that guide selection of trees to be removed or retained. Each prescription was tailored to a specific forest type based on plant associations. The ecosystem restoration principles developed by Drs. Jerry Franklin and Norm Johnson guided the development of the forest prescriptions. The intent of these principles is to move the current conditions toward desired forest conditions that include the maintenance of older trees, restoration of characteristic structure and composition, and increased heterogeneity. These conditions will result in more resilient forest stands. The Pilot project also proposed to implement transportation management activities, including road maintenance, renovation, construction, and decommissioning.

The project is on BLM-administered lands within the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) land allocation as defined in the Northwest Forest Plan and the Medford District BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP). The main objective of the Applegate AMA is to develop and test forest management practices including partial cutting, prescribed burning, and low impact approaches to forest harvest that provide for a broad range of forest values, including late-successional forest and high quality riparian habitat. The AMA is also intended to be used to develop and test management approaches that integrate and achieve ecological and economic health and other social objectives (USDI 1995, p. 36).

Within the BLM ownership, Oregon and California Lands (O&C) comprise 88 percent of the planning area with Public Domain (PD) at 12 percent.

The Public Land Survey System (PLSS) description of the Pilot Thompson Project is T38S-R04W-Sections 19, 20, 27-31, 33, 34; T39S-R05W-Sections 12, 25; and T39S-R04W-Sections 3-6, 8, 9, 19, 30, 31 in Jackson County, Oregon, Willamette Meridian.

THE DECISION

This decision authorizes non-commercial thinning (cutting, hand-piling, and pile burning) on 921 acres. Vegetation will be reserved in all areas of the units. Conifer trees less than 7 inches diameter breast height (dbh) will be thinned on about a 25-foot spacing. The following preferred species order will be used for selecting tree retention: sugar pine, ponderosa pine, cedar, Douglas-fir, then white fir. All leave trees will be pruned to eight feet in height to increase the crown heights and reduce ladder fuels. Prescriptions avoid the cutting of white oak, black oak and madrone. Brush and excess conifer species will be cut and hand piled. Where portions of units are brush dominated, brush clumps (no greater than 15' canopy width) will be retained on about a 45-foot spacing. Pile burning is usually completed within 6 months to one year of cutting and piling operations depending on the time of year that material is cut and hand-piled; slash needs a period of time to cure before burning can take place.

Follow-up maintenance underburning may take place within 5 years following initial treatments to achieve desired fuels and vegetation conditions through the reintroduction of fire. Underburning involves the controlled application of fire to understory vegetation and downed woody material when fuel moisture, soil moisture, and weather and atmospheric conditions allow for the fire to be confined to a predetermined area at a prescribed intensity to achieve the planned resource objectives. Prescribed underburning usually occurs during late winter to spring when soil and duff moisture conditions are sufficient to retain the required amounts of duff, large woody material, and to reduce soil heating. Occasionally, these conditions can be met during the fall season.

Table 1. Project Units and Treatments

Unit	Non-Commercial Prescription	Plant Series	NSO Habitat Type ¹	NSO Habitat Effects	Acres
19-2	Density Management	Douglas-fir	NRF	T&M	5
19-3	Density Management	White Oak and Pine	Dispersal	T&M	97
19-5	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	10
19-6	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal/NRF	T&M	9
19-7	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	8
19-8	Density Management	Pine	Capable	Disturbance Only	22
19-9	Density Management	Pine	Dispersal	T&M	36
19-10	Density Management	Douglas-fir	NRF	T&M	18
19-11	Density Management	Pine	Dispersal	T&M	7
19-12	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	14
19-13	Density Management	Pine	Dispersal	T&M	8
20-2	Density Management	White Oak and Pine	Capable	Disturbance Only	164
20-3	Density Management	Pine	Capable	Disturbance Only	23
25-1	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	164
25-2	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	8
25-3	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	18
25-4	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal/NRF	T&M	38
25-5	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	108
25-6	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	67
25-8	Density Management	Douglas-fir	NRF	T&M	10

¹ NSO habitat types are defined in the Terrestrial Wildlife section of Chapter 3 (p. 3-96) of the Revised Environmental Assessment for the Pilot Thompson Project.

Unit	Non-Commercial Prescription	Plant Series	NSO Habitat Type ¹	NSO Habitat Effects	Acres
25-9	Density Management	Douglas-fir	NRF	T&M	19
25-10	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	14
28-1	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Capable	Disturbance Only	29
28-4	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	7
28-5	Density Management	White Oak	Capable	Disturbance Only	1
28-6	Density Management	White Oak	Capable	Disturbance Only	1
33-1	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Dispersal	T&M	6
33-8	Density Management	Douglas-fir	Capable	Disturbance Only	2
33-9	Density Management	Pine	Dispersal	T&M	8
NRF= Resting, Roosting, and Foraging T&M = Treat and Maintain				Total Acres	921

All applicable Project Design Features (PDFs) will be incorporated into the contract as required conditions of this project. A complete listing of the PDFs can be found in Chapter 2 of the REA (pp. 2-33 to 2-45).

DECISION RATIONALE

My decision to implement the above fuels reduction activities is based on consideration of the relative merits and consequences of either implementing or not implementing the Pilot Thompson Project, as documented in the Revised EA (REA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). I have also considered all public comments and concerns received. I have determined that my decision outlined above best meets the purpose and need for this project, as identified in Chapter 1 of the Pilot Thompson Revised EA.

Non-commercial density management/fuels reduction treatments authorized under this decision would reduce hazardous fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface, maintain species composition appropriate for site conditions, and would promote fire resiliency within and adjacent to units treated.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), formal consultation was completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Service concluded in its Biological Opinion (Tails #: 01EOFW00-2013-F-0091) that the District's proposed activity was found to be likely to adversely affect northern spotted owls, but not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl (REA p. 3-106). Portions of the Pilot Thompson Project are within 2012 critical habitat sub-unit KLV-4 as determined by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

A no effect determination was made by the BLM regarding federally-listed aquatic species, specifically Southern Oregon Northern California Coastal (SONCC) coho, their Critical Habitat, or Essential Fish Habitat (REA p. 3-86; Appendix B, p. B-2).

A no effect determination was made by the BLM regarding federally-listed plant species. Portions of the Pilot Thompson project area (596 acres within proposed non-commercial units) are within the range of the plant species *Fritillaria gentneri*, a species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Two years of surveys are required for larger scale projects within suitable *Fritillaria gentneri* habitat, or one year of surveys may be completed in concurrence with formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Only one year of surveys has been completed in the Pilot Thompson project area, therefore, formal consultation is underway. However, as this Decision Record will not authorize treatments in any suitable habitat, consultation does not need to be completed prior to this decision.

In accordance with the Protocol for Managing Cultural Resources on Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Oregon, and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (specifically section 106), as amended, a literature review and archaeological reconnaissance was conducted for the Pilot Thompson project area. The project will not adversely impact any sites of cultural or historical significance. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was informed of the BLM's finding in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5(b) (REA, p. 3-146).

Letters were sent on October 2, 2012 to the following Federally Recognized Tribes: the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon.

Also notified were the following City, County, State and Federal groups: the Association of O&C Counties, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Department of State Forestry, Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Jackson County Commissioners and Courthouse, Jackson County Stockman's Association, Medford Irrigation District, National Marine Fisheries Service, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Collaboration has played a large role in the Pilot process. The Medford District has participated in long-term efforts with the Applegate Partnership and the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative to increase public support for forest projects that are socially acceptable, ecologically appropriate and economically viable. Those community groups, as well as other interested stakeholders, have had substantial participation in the Pilot process. Numerous public meetings, workshops and field trips have occurred as part of the planning process to inform interested stakeholders and the public about the Pilot, its goals, and its foundational principles.

To date, the Pilot Thompson planning process has:

- Included two scoping periods where we have provided opportunities for the public to comment on the project (September 2011 and April 2012);
- Published a Final Scoping Report summarizing the issues identified during both scoping periods in August 2012;
- Co-hosted six field trips (November 2011, September and October 2012, March, April, and May 2013);
- Co-hosted four public meetings (October 2011, February 2012, February and May 2013);

- Participated in two neighborhood meetings in the Thompson Creek area (April and May 2012);
- Sent an update letter to interested parties that outlined the preliminary proposed action alternatives prior to the EA being published (November 2012).
- Posted all planning documents, including interdisciplinary (ID) team meeting notes, public comment letters, maps, and field trip and public meeting information to the Pilot website in a timely manner; and
- Invited three members of the public to participate on the ID Team.

PLAN CONFORMANCE

Resource Management Plan

The Pilot Thompson Project is designed to be in conformance with the *1995 Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan* (RMP). The 1995 Medford District Resource Management Plan incorporated the *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (Northwest Forest Plan) (USDA and USDI 1994).

The Pilot Thompson Project contains Project Design Features that apply Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Appendix D of the 1995 RMP (as modified by IM-OR-2011-074). As designed, this project complies with Management Direction, Objectives, and Best Management Practices of the 1995 Medford District RMP.

The Pilot Thompson Project is consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan as amended by the 2001 *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (2001 ROD). 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 Pilot Thompson Project is consistent with BLM Manual 6840 (USDI 2008), the purpose of which is to provide policy and guidance for the conservation of BLM special status species and the ecosystems upon which they depend on BLM-administered lands. BLM special status species include those species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as well as those designated as Bureau sensitive by the State Director(s). The objectives of the BLM special status policy are:

- To conserve and/or recover ESA-listed species and the ecosystems on which they depend so that ESA protections are no longer needed for these species; and
- To initiate proactive conservation² measures that reduces or eliminates threats to Bureau sensitive species to minimize the likelihood of and need for listing of these species under the ESA (USDI 2008: section 0.02).

This decision is also in conformance with the direction given for the management of public lands in the Medford District by the Oregon and California Lands Act of 1937 (O&C Act), Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA)

² Conservation: as applied to Bureau sensitive species, is the use of programs, plans, and management practices to reduce or eliminate threats affecting the status of the species, or improve the condition of the species' habitat on BLM-administered lands (USDI 2008, Glossary p. 2).

of 1973, the Clean Water Act of 1987, Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 (as amended 1986 and 1996), Clean Air Act of 1990, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

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 the *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
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

12-9-15

Date