

## Rickreall Creek Watershed Enhancement Environmental Assessment

### Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Assessment Number DOI-BLM-OR-S050-2010-0004

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United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Oregon State Office  
Salem District  
Marys Peak Resource Area

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# FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

## Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (Environmental Assessment Number DOI-BLM-OR-050-2010-0004-EA) for a proposal to implement three projects as follows.

- Project 1, Mid-Seral and Late-Seral Enhancement, is a proposal to perform density management on approximately 1,344 acres of Late Successional Reserve (LSR), Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and Riparian Reserve (RR) land use allocations (LUAs).
- Project 2, Legacy tree release and snag and coarse woody debris (CWD) creation is a proposal for older forest legacy tree release, and snag/CWD creation on approximately 790 acres of LSR, Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and RR LUAs.
- Project 3, Large Woody Debris (LWD) enhancement on up to 6 miles over three stream segments including the mainstem Rickreall Creek above Mercer Reservoir, the South Fork Rickreall Creek, and North Fork Rickreall Creek. This proposed project would be a cooperative effort between Rickreall Creek Watershed Council, BLM and Forest Capital Inc. to increase habitat complexity in the Rickreall Creek Watershed. The BLM would provide approximately 300 trees to be used in the wood placement project. In cooperation with Rickreall Creek Watershed Council and other parties the BLM would work towards contracting for the felling, yarding, and placement of trees in the streams consistent with design features outlined in this EA.

The project areas are within BLM-managed lands in Township 7 South, Range 6 West, Section 22, Township 7 South, Range 7 West, Section 33, Township 8 South, Range 7 West, Sections 4, 5, 9 and 10 and on private land in Township 8 South, Range 7 West, Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10 Willamette Meridian (**EA Map 1**) and within the Rickreall Creek, Mill Creek, Salt Creek, and Luckiamute River Watersheds.

The analysis in this EA is site-specific and supplements analyses found in the *Salem District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*, September 1994 (RMP/FEIS). The proposed thinning activities have been designed to conform to the *Salem District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan*, May 1995 (RMP) as amended and related documents which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM lands within the Salem District (*EA Section 1.4*). Consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service is described in Section 7.0 of the EA.

The EA and draft FONSI was available for public review March 7, 2012 to April 6, 2012. The notice for public comment was published in a legal notice by the *Polk County Itemizer Observer* newspaper. The BLM received two comment letters during the review period. Substantive comments will be responded to in future Decision Records.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Based upon review of the Rickreall Creek Watershed Enhancement EA and supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general areas. No site-specific environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, supplemental or additional information to the analysis done in the RMP/FEIS through a new environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following information:

**Context:** Potential effects resulting from the implementation of the proposed actions have been analyzed within the context of the Rickreall Creek, Salt Creek, Mill Creek, and Luckiamute River 5<sup>th</sup> field Watersheds. The proposed action would occur on approximately 1,344 acres of BLM-managed land and private land, encompassing less than one percent of the forest cover within each of the Rickreall Creek Watershed, Mill Creek, Luckiamute River, and Salt Creek Watershed [40 CFR 1508.27(a)].

### **Intensity:**

1. [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)] – **Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse:** The resources potentially affected by the proposed thinning, legacy tree enhancement and LWD enhancement activities are: air quality, fire risk, and fuels management, fisheries and aquatic habitat, invasive, non-native plant species, migratory birds, other special status species and habitat – wildlife, soils, water quality, and wildlife habitat components. The proposed actions are unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on these resources for the following reasons:

**Project Design Features** described in EA section 2.6 would reduce the risk of effects to affected resources to be within RMP standards and guidelines within the effects described in the RMP/EIS.

**Vegetation and Forest Stand Characteristics** (EA sections 3.8 and 4.8): 1/ No T&E or bureau sensitive-vascular plant, lichens, bryophytes or fungi species would be affected.

**Noxious Weeds** – While the number of plants may increase in the short term, any increase that does occur should be short lived because all large areas with ground disturbing activities would be grass seeded with Oregon Certified (blue tagged) red fescue (*Festuca rubra*) at a rate equal to 40 pounds per acre or sown/planted with other native species as approved by the resource area botanist. Sowing disturbed soil areas allows the sown seed to become established and dominant in areas that may otherwise be suitable for noxious weeds to become established thus reducing the physical space of the potential habitat for noxious weeds to become established.

Implementation of the Marys Peak integrated non-native plant management plan (EA # OR080-06-09) allows for early detection of non-native plant species which allows for rapid

control and generally these species often persist for several years after timber harvest but soon decline as native vegetation increases within the project areas. In addition, all road construction and road maintenance areas would be monitored for Scot's broom infestations and eradicated under this proposal and as part of MP's non-native plant management plan. Other species would be eradicated as funding allows. No significant increase in populations of the noxious weed (invasive/non-native) species identified during the field surveys is expected to occur because this project would disrupt very few acres of exposed mineral soil which could provide habitat for noxious weed species. All of the proposed timber removal activities are planned and laid out to remain below the cumulative level of 10 percent aerial extent of soil disturbance from the RMP Timber harvest BMPs, 2008, FEIS, Appendix I.

Stands proposed for harvest activities are not presently functioning as late-successional old growth habitat.

**Fisheries, Hydrology, and Soils** (*EA sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.6*): The estimated 5.0 miles of new road construction would be located outside Riparian Reserves and generally be located on ridge top locations. Gentle to moderate slope gradients in project areas provide little opportunity for surface runoff to reach stream channels. The stream protection zones [SPZs (variable distances ranging from a minimum of 55 feet on perennial and intermittent streams)] would prevent any overland flow and sediment generated by logging from reaching streams. The SPZs would maintain the current vegetation in the primary shade zone and treatments would retain most of the current levels of shading in the secondary shade zone. Soil compaction is limited to no more than 10 percent of each unit's acreage. Road work (including culvert installations) would take place during the dry season.

**Wildlife** (*EA sections 3.8 and 4.8*): 1/ Existing snags and CWD would be retained. The few large (greater than 20 inches diameter and greater than 15 feet tall) snags that could be felled for safety or knocked over by falling and yarding operations would be retained as CWD. 2/ No suitable habitat for any BLM special status species known to be present would be lost or downgraded. Therefore, the project would not contribute to the need to list any BLM special status species. 3/ Thinning would not significantly change species diversity (a combination of species richness and relative abundance) of the migratory and resident bird community. No species would become extirpated in the watershed as a result of thinning, though some species would be likely to leave or enter thinned stands as a short-term response to reduced canopy closure and tree density.

**Air Quality, Fire Risk, and Fuels Management** (*EA sections 3.1 and 4.1*): The Mid and Late-Seral Enhancement and Legacy Tree Release projects may create an increased risk of fire from the slash that is created. This would be mitigated by treating slash in small gaps within Density Management harvest areas, within Phellinus weirii pockets, at timber sale landing areas, and along open roads and property lines where the opportunities for ignition are greatest. The fine fuels (fuels in the one and ten hour size classes) would decay within three to five years in most of the units and the risk of surface fire would decrease to near current levels. The thinning would remove most of the ladder fuels and decrease the crown bulk density, reducing the risk of a canopy fire. Piling and burning slash at landings and in some fuel treatment areas would have a short duration impact on air quality. Strict

adherence to smoke management regulations would result in little or no impact to the public.

**Carbon Sequestration and Climate Change** (EA sections 3.2 and 4.2): The Rickreall Creek Watershed Enhancement EA is tiered to the PRMP FEIS (1994) which concluded that all alternatives analyzed in the FEIS, in their entirety including all timber harvest, would have only slight (context indicates that the effect would be too small to calculate) effect on carbon dioxide levels. Analyses completed for projects of similar scope, treatment type, stand type, and scale have supported the conclusion of the 1995 RMP that project emissions would be negligible.

With the implementation of the project design features described in EA section 2.6, potential effects to the affected elements of the environment are anticipated to be site-specific and/or not measurable (i.e. undetectable over the watershed, downstream, and/or outside of the project areas). The Projects are designed to meet RMP standards and guidelines, modified by subsequent direction (EA section 1.3); and the effects of these projects would not exceed those effects described in the RMP/FEIS.

2. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)] – **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety:** The project’s effects to public health and safety would not be significant because the project occurs in a forested setting, removed from urban and residential areas, where the primary activities are forest management and timber harvest.

Public safety along haul routes would be minimally affected because log truck traffic from forest management activities on both private and public land is common and the majority of the public using these haul routes are aware of the hazards involved in driving on these forest roads. In addition, Project Design Features require use of signs, road blocks, and/or flaggers near project activities to provide for public safety (EA section 2.6).

3. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)] – **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas:** The proposed project would not affect historical or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas, because these are not located within the project area. Appropriate measures would be taken to protect the ACEC located near the Cedar Ridge timber sale (EA section 2.6)
  - Unique characteristics of the geographic areas [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)] because there are no historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, or ecologically critical areas located within the project areas (EA section 3.1);
  - Districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or 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 [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)] (EA section 3.1).

4. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)] – **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:** The proposed projects are not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without highly controversial, highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.
5. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)] – **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment area highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:** The effects associated with the project do not have uncertain, unique, or unknown risks, because the BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without these risks. Project Design Features (EA section 2.6) would minimize risks associated with the project.
6. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(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 proposed action would not establish a precedent for future actions, nor would it represent a decision in principle about a further consideration for the following reasons: 1/ The project is within the scope of proposed activities documented in the Salem District RMP. 2/ The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without setting a precedent for future actions or representing a decision about a further consideration. See #4 and #5, above.
7. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)] – **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:** The Interdisciplinary Team evaluated the project area in context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions and determined that there is not a potential for significant cumulative effects on affected resources (EA section 4.0). Effects are not likely to be significant because of the project’s scope (effects are likely to be too small to be measurable), scale, and duration.
8. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)] – **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources:** The project would not affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor would the project cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
9. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)] – **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973:** The proposed project is not expected to adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat for the following reasons:

#### **U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Due to potential affects to spotted owls, marbled murrelets and their designated critical habitat, as outlined in Table 5, Section 7(a) of the Endangered Species Act requires that this proposed action receive consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Consultation has been addressed by inclusion of the proposed action units within either of two batched Biological Assessments (BAs) that analyzed all projects that may modify the habitat of

listed wildlife species on federal lands within the Northern Oregon Coast Range during fiscal years 2011 and 2012. All projects of the proposed action have been designed to incorporate all appropriate design standards included in these BAs. A Letter of Concurrence (#13420-2010-I-0105) and a Biological Opinion (#13420-2010-F-0184) have been received from the Service and they do not require any changes or additions to the incorporated project design standards. The Biological Opinion also concludes that the proposed action would not result in jeopardy to listed species and would not adversely modify critical habitat for either the spotted owl or marbled murrelet.

### **National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)**

Consultation with NMFS is required for all actions which may affect listed fish species and critical habitat under the ESA.

#### Project 1

Upper Willamette River Winter Steelhead are listed as threatened under the ESA, as amended, and are known to occur within the Mill Creek, Luckiamute River and Rickreall Creek systems.

A determination has been made that the proposed Project 1 “may affect” Upper winter steelhead. The ‘may affect’ determination is primarily due to the proximity of listed fish and critical habitat adjacent to proposed haul routes in the Luckiamute River and Rickreall Creek Watersheds. Due to the Proposed Actions’ “may affect” determination consultation with NMFS would be required on ESA listed UWR winter steelhead.

The proposed actions would have “no effect” to UWR Spring Chinook salmon and Oregon chub. Generally, the “no effect” determination is based on the distance upstream of project activities (approximately 8 to 25 miles) from ESA listed Chinook salmon critical habitat and historic habitat for Oregon chub. Consultation with NMFS is not required for UWR Spring Chinook salmon or with USFWS for Oregon chub for these projects.

#### Projects 2 and 3

Proposed actions which may affect would comply with existing programmatic consultation and relevant design criteria, and no additional consultation would be necessary. The proposed actions are covered under NMFS *Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Consultation Biological and Conference Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for Fish Habitat Restoration Activities in Oregon and Washington, CY2007–CY2012*.

Protection of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) as described by the Magnuson/Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act and consultation with NMFS is required for all projects which may adversely affect EFH of Chinook and Coho salmon. The proposed Rickreall

Creek Watershed Enhancement EA Projects are not expected to adversely affect EFH due to distance of all activities associated with the project from occupied habitat. Consultation with NMFS on EFH is not required for these projects.

10. [40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)] – **Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The proposed project has been designed to follow Federal, State, and local laws (EA section 1.3).

Approved by: Rich Hatfield  
Rich Hatfield  
Marys Peak Resource Area Field Manager

4-19-2012  
Date