

Alsea Meteorological Tower Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-ORWA-S050-2016-0002-EA
Salem District, Marys Peak Field Office

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted an environmental analysis for a proposal to issue a Right-of-Way (ROW) Grant that would authorize the Proponent, OSU, to construct a meteorological tower in the Alsea Meteorological Tower Environmental Assessment (EA). The authorization would be for the right to construct, operate, and maintain the site and trail foot path for 20 years.

The project area is located approximately five miles west of Alsea, Oregon, in Benton County on forested land managed by the Marys Peak Field Office of the Salem District BLM. The project area lies within the Marys River fifth-field watershed in Township 14 South, Range 7 West, Sections 25 and 36, Willamette Meridian.

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 projects 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 1.5).

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon review of the Alsea Meteorological Tower 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 area. No site-specific environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 C.F.R. 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 [40 CFR 1508.27(a)]: Potential effects resulting from the implementation of the Proposed Action have been analyzed within the context of the project area boundaries. The Proposed Action would affect approximately one-half acre of BLM-administered land (EA p. 5).

Intensity refers to severity of impact [40 CFR 1508.27(b)]. The following text shows how that the Proposed Action would not have significant impacts with regard to the ten considerations for evaluating intensity, as described in 40 CFR 1508.27(b).

1. [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)] – *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse*: The Proposed Action is unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on the affected elements of the environment for the following reasons:

- Project design features (PDFs) described in EA section 2.4 (EA p. 15-17) would reduce the risk of effects to affected resources to be within RMP standards and guidelines within the effects described in the RMP/FEIS, as modified by subsequent direction (EA section 1.5). The BLM has found the implementation of PDFs to be effective in reducing the likelihood of negative impacts. 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) and would not exceed those effects described in the RMP/FEIS.
- Hydrology, Water Quality and Channel Function (EA section 3.2): Project actions are located a minimum of 150 feet from the nearest stream (EA p. 22, 23). Leaving the areas of disturbance to recover and re-vegetate would sustain long-term site stability by maintaining the infiltration capacity, the nutrient storage and cycling and minimizing surface water flow and erosion (EA p. 22). The minor proposed disturbance activities associated with the tower and its associated structures (one-half acre), the road, and trail would result in no increase in turbidity or sediment delivery because there are no stream crossings or connection to any waterbodies in the project area (EA p. 21).
- Recreation and Visual Resources: Noise from project construction would adversely affect recreationists in the vicinity for the duration of the construction activities. These effects are short in duration. Noise would return to ambient levels after the completion of project activities. Prohibiting construction activities during weekends would also reduce impacts from noise and traffic (EA p. 16, PDF 5). The Proposed Action is not expected to adversely affect the visual resource values in the Alsea Falls Recreation Area, Alsea River, Fall Creek Bike Trail, and the town of Alsea because the tower is not likely to be noticeable from these locations (EA p. 26).
- Soils: Effects to soils would be unlikely to result in any reduction in soil productivity or disturb normal soil processes. Effects would be localized within the project area and short in duration. (EA section 3.4).
- Vegetation: Implementing this project would have no impact on T&E and Bureau Special Status botanical and fungal species because none are known to occur within the project area nor were any sites found during surveys. Noxious Weeds: PDFs and applicant proposed protection measures have been incorporated into this project to keep the amount of exposed mineral soil minimized and reduce the introduction and spread of noxious and invasive species (EA p. 16, PDFs 2-4). Project effects are localized to the project site, road, and access trail. Therefore, the Proposed Action is not anticipated to increase the abundance or spread of invasive plants (EA section 3.5).
- Wildlife: The Proposed Action would maintain forest wildlife habitat. Less than 10 trees would be felled during project activities. The Proposed Action would take place outside of the migratory bird nesting season. The risk of bats or birds colliding with the tower is low, because the proposed meteorological tower and guy-lines have a very low exposure profile with less than 90 feet extending above the tree tops, and a total height below 220 feet. Over the 20 year project timeline, the meteorological tower's exposure profile would decrease to about 50 feet as the canopy level of the surrounding forest grows upward (EA section 3.6.1, p. 37). See also "Wildlife" under FONSI bullet 9.

2. *[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (2)] - The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety:* The Proposed Action is unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on public health or safety because the project would implement safety measures to prevent or reduce safety hazards through the ROW grant.
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 Action is unlikely to have significant adverse impacts on unique characteristics of the geographic area for the following reasons:
 - Field surveys found no cultural or historical resources within the project area (EA section 5.2.1).
 - The Proposed Action is not within jurisdictional wetlands, parklands, prime farmlands, or wilderness, ecologically critical areas (area of critical environmental concern - ACEC) or within a Wild and Scenic River corridor.
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 Action is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience authorizing a proponent this type of tower and associated structures without highly controversial effects (EA section 3.0).
5. *[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)] - The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:* The effects associated as a result of the Proposed Action do not have any uncertain, unique or unknown risks because the BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without these risks. Project design features would minimize the risks associated with the Proposed Action (EA section 2.4, p. 15). See FONSI bullet 4, above.
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 does not set a precedent for future actions that may have significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. No hazardous materials or solid waste would be created in the project area. There would be no reduction in the amount of late-successional forest habitat on federal forestlands (NWFP p. C-44). The Proposed Action would not retard or prevent the attainment of the ACS objectives (EA section 4.0).
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 Proposed Action in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. The Proposed Action will not have cumulative effects to any resource for the following reasons:
 - The proposed action would have no effect and therefore no cumulative effect for the following resources: hydrology, vegetation - T/E plant species, forest structure, and habitat, (see FONSI bullet 1).
 - The effects of the Proposed Action on recreation, soils, vegetation - noxious weeds, and wildlife are expected to be localized within the project site and the effects are short in duration. There are no other actions affecting those resources within the project area at the same time as the Proposed Action (See FONSI bullet 1, EA section 3.0).

