

The East Fork Nehalem Timber Management Project

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) For Environmental Assessment: DOI-BLM-ORWA-S060-2014-0005-EA

May 2016

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Office
Salem District, Tillamook Field Office
Columbia County, Oregon

Responsible Agency: USDI - Bureau of Land Management

Responsible Official: Karen Schank
Field Manager
Tillamook Resource Area
4610 Third Street
Tillamook, OR 97141
(503) 815-1100

For Further Information, contact: Andy Pampush
Tillamook Resource Area
4610 Third Street
Tillamook, OR 97141
(503) 815-1143

Introduction

The Tillamook Field Office, Salem District Bureau of Land Management (BLM), proposes to implement forest management activities on approximately 719 acres of BLM lands, which includes commercial timber sales, within the East Fork Nehalem River 6th-field subwatershed of the Nehalem River watershed. The proposed action includes regeneration harvest and commercial thinning within the Matrix land use allocation (General Forest Management Area [GFMA] and Connectivity/Diversity Block [CON]), and commercial density management within the Riparian Reserve (RR) land use allocation. The action would occur in forest stands in various conditions. Some stands are at or above the age which produces maximum average annual growth over the lifetime of the stand, other stands are underproductive due to disease, poor stocking or they are stocked with less desirable commercial species, while still other stands are overly dense and in need of thinning to continue healthy growth rates and structural development. Many of the Riparian Reserve stands proposed for treatments are either overstocked with a single aged Douglas-fir overstory that lacks the structural layering characteristic of older stands, or are stocked with hardwoods that are beginning to reach mortality and reduce canopy cover.

The action also includes construction, maintenance and improvement of roads and culverts, treatment of approximately 29 acres to control the spread of *Phellinus weirii*, a root disease, as well as treatment of a portion of the fuels created by the harvest operations.

The objective of the timber management project and associated actions would be twofold: 1) to contribute to the Salem District's 1995 Resource Management Plan (RMP) requirement (developed to meet the O&C Lands Act of 1937) to produce a sustainable supply of timber to provide jobs and contribute to community stability while balancing cost effectiveness with other required objectives of the RMP; and 2) to maintain and improve the development and function of forests within the Riparian Reserve land use allocation to meet the needs of aquatic species and terrestrial species associated with riparian forests while meeting the RMP's Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives.

The area where the East Fork Nehalem Timber Management Project would occur is approximately 5 miles east of the town of Vernonia, Oregon. The project area includes BLM-managed lands within sections 5, 17, and 21, Township 4 North, Range 3 West; and sections 31 and 33, Township 5 North, Range 3 West, Willamette Meridian (WM), in Columbia County, Oregon.

The EA and unsigned FONSI was made available for public review from **August 28, 2015** through **September 28, 2015**. The notice for public comment was published in legal notices by the South County Spotlight newspaper of Scappoose, Oregon. Two comment letters (emailed) were received by the Tillamook Field Manager and will be considered in making any final decisions for this project.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon review of the East Fork Nehalem Timber Management Project EA and the supporting project record, I have determined that this project is not a major federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. There are no site specific impacts that would require supplemental/additional information to the analysis done in the *Salem District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*, September 1994 (RMP/FEIS). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This finding is based on the following discussion:

Context. The proposed project is a site-specific action directly involving a total of approximately 719 acres of BLM administered land, along with actions occurring on various haul roads. These actions would affect about 3.5% of the 20,608 acre East Fork Nehalem 6th field subwatershed and by themselves do not have international, national, region-wide, or state-wide importance.

The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended actions and is within the context of local importance. The EA details the effects of the action alternative; none of the effects identified, including direct, indirect and cumulative effects, are considered to be significant and do not exceed those effects described in the RMP/FEIS.

Intensity. The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27. The discussions below apply to the proposed action contained within the East Fork Nehalem Timber Management Projects Environmental Assessment.

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse: The effects of the timber management project are unlikely to have significant (beneficial and/or adverse) impacts (*EA Section 6*) for the following reasons:

Vegetation and Forest Resources (*EA section 6.1*): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

- The forest stand treatments have been designed with consideration for providing or maintaining important ecological functions such as dispersal of organisms, carryover of some species from one stand to the next, and maintenance of valuable structural components such as down logs, snags and large trees.
- No late-successional forest would be harvested.

- Selected Riparian Reserve stands would develop greater structural complexity in a reduced amount of time while maintaining current stream integrity and conditions.

Hydrology (EA sections 2.2 and 6.2): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

- The project effects on water quality would comply with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) water quality standards and the Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) standard for the East Fork Nehalem River subwatershed.
- Stream temperature will be maintained within the project area by retaining the current vegetation and shading in the primary shade zone (no-harvest buffers) and nearly all of the current levels of shading provided by the secondary shade zone, and thus will continue to contribute to meeting the TMDL for the East Fork Nehalem River downstream. Establishment of a second canopy layer in some portions of the Riparian Reserve will also contribute to increased shading in the primary and secondary shade zones as trees begin to reach mid-canopy level.
- Water quality would be maintained because logging, road construction/renovation, culvert replacement, road maintenance and timber haul project design features (EA section 4.4) and no-harvest buffers are expected to prevent or minimize sediment from reaching streams and causing sediment/turbidity that would exceed ODEQ water quality standards.
- The project will accelerate the growth of trees in the outer portion of riparian reserves which will result in the potential for higher quality in-stream large wood sooner if and when natural processes recruit wood to the streams.
- The project will not have any detectable effect on stream discharges or peak flows due to the limited scale and intensity of the project relative to the size of the subwatershed (EA section 2.2).

Fisheries Resources - (Includes ESA listed fish species, BLM Special Status Species, and Magnuson-Stevens Essential Fish Habitat) (EA sections 2.2 and 6.2): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

- There is not expected to be a measurable reduction in wood recruitment from the project therefore the project is not expected to affect in-stream features that are part of listed fish or Bureau status fish habitat (Oregon Coast Coho, steelhead).
- The establishment of shade tolerant conifers and subsequent development of multiple canopy layers within a portion of riparian forests will indirectly benefit listed and Bureau status fish by providing a more naturally functioning forest ecosystem that will contribute to better hydrologic function.
- Stream temperatures in the project area are expected to be maintained and will not contribute to adverse effects to listed fish or contribute to the need to list Bureau status fish.
- Small immeasurable, short duration, increases to sedimentation in project area streams are not expected to have consequences to listed or Bureau status fish.
- No detectable changes to stream discharge or peak flows will occur therefore there would not be any expected effect to listed or Bureau status fish.
- The nearest road maintenance activity to listed fish habitat is over 480 feet away with a median distance of all maintenance activities at 2,228 feet away from listed fish habitat.

Wildlife Resources - (Includes ESA listed species, BLM Special Status Species, Survey and Manage Species, Migratory Bird Treaty Act species, and certain RMP species requiring coarse wood habitat): (EA sections 2.2 and 6.3) Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

ESA Listed Species

- The proposed project area does not contain Critical Habitat for either the northern spotted owl or the marbled murrelet.
- The proposed project will have little likelihood of affecting the marbled murrelet because:
 - The project is within Oregon Marbled Murrelet Zone 2, approximately 42 miles from the ocean, where no murrelet nesting has been detected to date.
 - The only known potential nesting structures within the analysis area have been excluded from proposed harvest units by at least 330 feet.

- In the unlikely event that murrelets are present, disruption of nesting behavior would likely not occur because log hauling and road maintenance are activities that are not disruptive to murrelets, and road construction, chainsaw use and harvesting are only considered to be disruptive when occurring within 330 feet of nest sites (USFWS 2014).
- Only 1% of the East Fork Nehalem subwatershed is suitable habitat for the northern spotted owl and none of those acres would be treated or otherwise affected by the proposed action.
- Based on the lack of suitable habitat, geographic isolation from blocks of suitable habitat, intensive forest management on private lands (78% of the subwatershed), and no known current or historic spotted owl nest sites, there is little likelihood that spotted owls currently use the analysis area and therefore could be affected by the proposed action.
- The temporary reduction in dispersal habitat in the analysis area from 39.2% to 37.8% caused by the proposed action would have little discernable effect because: 1) The proposed project area is likely not used by owls due to the geographic isolation from blocks of suitable habitat; and 2) private forest lands are fairly well regulated (fairly even age class distribution) which means that as acres of dispersal habitat are harvested, similar numbers of acres develop into dispersal habitat resulting in mostly static levels of dispersal habitat.

BLM Special Status Species, Survey and Manage Species, Migratory Bird Treaty Act species, and certain RMP species requiring coarse wood habitat: (EA sections 2.2 and 6.3)

- All acres of the project area that required surveys have been surveyed.
- No survey and manage mollusk species were found during surveys and there is not expected to be any loss of persistence at any undetected mollusk sites.
- No suitable red tree vole habitat exists within any harvest units; consequently, there would not be any expected effect to red tree voles caused by the proposed action.
- The proposed action would only have the possibility of minor effects to migratory birds by potentially disrupting breeding for one season at the site of activities, or by creating or possibly improving habitat for species that favor earlier seral habitat or edge habitat. The proposed project would have little possibility to adversely affect other Bureau Sensitive species.
- The project is not expected to adversely affect any bat species of concern identified in the Salem District RMP and Project Design Features requiring the reservation of larger green trees would benefit some bat species into the future.
- Based on current and expected snag levels the proposed action would likely continue to support populations of cavity nesting birds at least at the 40% population potential level at the completion of the project.

Botany and Invasive Plants - (Includes BLM Special Status Species and Survey and Manage Species): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

BLM Special Status Species and Survey and Manage Species: (EA section 2.2)

- All proposed action acres were surveyed for Survey and Manage and Special Status plant species and only one site of one species was found. The single site of *Cetralia cetrariodes* (designated S&M category E lichen under both 2001 and 2003 Annual Species Reviews) would be either excluded from the unit or buffered from the harvest area within a reserve tree clump.

Invasive, Non-native Species (Executive Order 13112): (EA section 6.4)

- The current assemblage of invasive, non-native species that exist within the project area are generally not tolerant of shade and should they emerge on additional disturbed sites within the project area it is expected that they would not persist as the canopy becomes closed again.
- Project Design Features that include equipment washing, monitoring, and eradication of discovered “Early Detection Rapid Response” (EDRR) species (particularly those invasive species that can become established in shady understories) is expected to keep new infestations of EDRR species from becoming established.

- Gravel sources, which can be vectors for invasive, noxious weeds would be inspected for EDRR species prior to approval for use.

Soils (*EA sections 2.2 and 6.5*): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- Fragile soil sites including very steep areas have been excluded from the action area.
- Project design features and Best Management Practices, including limiting compaction to 12% of the project area or less (BMP's from IM no. OR-2011-074; Table 31 of the EA), have been incorporated to specifically reduce soil compaction and displacement which in turn should reduce soil productivity loss associated with the project.
- Soils in the project area are very deep and resilient and are less susceptible to productivity losses resulting from timber harvest than are shallower soils.
- Project design features require the use of previously disturbed areas to the extent practicable which will reduce the area disturbed by harvesting equipment.

Air Quality, Fire Risk and Fuels Management (*EA section 2.2*): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- Any dust and smoke resulting from the proposed action will be localized and not affect populated areas or contribute negatively to human health and safety.
- Any burning that is done would be done in strict compliance with State of Oregon Smoke Management regulations.
- Project design features will reduce the potential for fire ignition by managing fuels most susceptible to ignition near roads. Small easily ignitable fuels will decay within a short time after harvest with a corresponding reduction in fire risk.

Carbon Storage, Carbon Emissions, and Climate Change (*EA section 2.2*): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- The incremental increase in carbon emissions as greenhouse gasses that could be attributable to the proposed action is of such small magnitude that it is unlikely to be detectable at global, continental or regional scales or to affect the results of any models now being used to predict climate change.
- Models indicate that after 35 years, carbon sequestration and storage would be similar to that modeled for the No Action alternative.

Recreation (*EA section 2.2*): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- The project will not change the types of recreation opportunities available, generally hunting and special forest products gathering.

Visual Resources (*EA section 2.2*) Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

- Analysis for Visual Resource Management was conducted and the project was found to adhere to visual resource management objectives for VRM class IV, the class which all of the project area lands are in. The proposed action includes a buffer of trees between unit 17-2 and the Scappoose – Vernonia road, an area where the motoring public may receive a glimpse of the harvest unit as they travel by.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety. Public health and safety was not identified as an issue. The proposed projects are comparable to other timber management projects that include regeneration harvest, commercial thinning and density management which have occurred within the Salem District with no unusual health or safety concerns.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. No historic or cultural resource sites have been identified within the project areas. There are no park lands, prime farm lands, or wilderness areas located within the project area. There are no federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers within the project areas. There are no known wetlands within the proposed project area; however, if any are discovered during project implementation, there are project design features incorporated into the project to protect them.

There are no other known ecologically critical areas within or adjacent to the project areas.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. Scoping of the proposed projects resulted in three comment letters indicating that the level of concern is no greater than most other projects the BLM proposes. The disposition of public comments is contained in section 11 of the EA.

The effects of the proposed projects on the quality of the human environment were adequately understood by the interdisciplinary team to provide an environmental analysis. A complete disclosure of the predicted effects of the proposed projects is contained within Section 6 of the EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The proposed projects are not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar projects in similar areas and have found effects to be reasonably predictable. The environmental effects to the human environment with the potential for significant impacts are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment which are considered to be highly uncertain or involve 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 proposed project 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. Any future projects will be evaluated through the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process and will stand on their own as to environmental effects.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The interdisciplinary team evaluated the proposed project in the context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions (sections 5 and 6). A complete disclosure of the effects of the action alternatives is contained in Section 6 of the EA. Cumulative effects have been identified for Vegetation and Forest Resources (EA Sections 6.1), Wildlife Resources (EA sections 6.3), and Soils Resources (EA Section 6.5). None of the identified cumulative effects were determined to be significant.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other 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 proposed project was assessed, including field reconnaissance, for its potential to contain important cultural properties and none were found (EA section 2.2). Therefore, the proposed projects will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will the proposed projects cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Project Design Features have been incorporated that would protect any cultural resource should they be discovered during project implementation (EA section 4.4).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its designated critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The proposed project is not within critical habitat for either the marbled murrelet or the spotted owl.

The spotted owl would be affected by the removal (299 acres) and modification (395 acres) of dispersal habitat. Those acres where modification would occur would continue to function as dispersal habitat after treatment. The impact to dispersal habitat would likely have little effect to spotted owls owing to the lack of known spotted owl activity within the project area, near total lack of suitable habitat within the geographic area of northwestern Oregon where the project is proposed, and the limited extent of public land where management for owls could occur. These facts make consideration of spotted owl dispersal habitat nearly inconsequential (EA section 6.3.1).

The proposed project would not affect marbled murrelet habitat and there is a very low probability that marbled murrelets could be using the small amount of suitable structures within the East Fork Nehalem analysis area; therefore disturbance to murrelets associated with the proposed action is very unlikely (see *Wildlife Resources* in section 1 above).

Because an unlikely possibility still exists that the proposed action could result in effects to spotted owls and marbled murrelets, informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, would occur prior to any decision to implement the proposed action (EA section 8). Consultation would be completed by including the projects (timber sales resulting from implementation of the East Fork Nehalem Timber Management Project) within the appropriate programmatic biological assessment prepared by the interagency Level 1 Team (terrestrial subgroup) for the North Coast Province. The projects would be submitted for inclusion in the appropriate programmatic consultation for the years in which the project(s) would be implemented. If any of the projects are determined to not be in compliance with the standards of the programmatic consultation, the project would be modified to be in compliance with the programmatic consultation while remaining within the scope of impacts analyzed in the EA, or a project-specific consultation would be conducted. In either case, all of the appropriate Terms and Conditions of the appropriate Letter of Concurrence would be incorporated.

The East Fork Nehalem Timber Management Project would not affect any fish species listed under the Endangered Species Act; therefore no consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service is warranted.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed projects do not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The EA and supporting Project Record contain discussions pertaining to the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13112 (Invasive Species). State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, the proposed projects are consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

Prepared by: 
Andy Pampush
IDTeam Leader & Environmental Coordinator

5/17/16
Date

Approved by: 
Karen M. Schank
Tillamook Field Manager

5/17/16
Date