



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mt. Hood National Forest

Hood River Ranger District
6780 Highway 35
Mt. Hood-Parkdale, OR 97041
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File Code: 1950

Date: February 7, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

The Hood River Ranger District on the Mt. Hood National Forest has identified you as an individual, agency, or organization that might be interested in commenting on our proposed action for the analysis of pre-commercial thinning in general forest areas and riparian reserves.

Purpose and Need for Action: Timber management practices over the past several decades have created numerous early seral conifer plantations that currently contain too many trees per acre and are at a high risk potential for catastrophic crown fire. In addition, many of these young stands were planted with only a few conifer species and are showing monoculture characteristics. Pre-commercial thinning has opportunity to improve the health and productivity of these plantations and to reduce the moisture/light competition and influence the species composition. Pre-commercial thinning also reduces the stand characteristics that directly influence the potential fire intensity. Fire intensity in thinned plantations is reduced further if the pre-commercial thinning treatment is accompanied by reducing/treating the activity fuels created by the cuttings.

In addition, plantations adjacent to streams lack mature forest characteristics, such as large diameter snags, down logs and large diameter trees. This larger material provides channel complexity, streamside shading, bank stability, and other benefits to aquatic and riparian species. These plantations, within the riparian reserves, are mainly less than 25-years old, even-aged, with trees spaced very close together. As a result, the trees are not growing as quickly as their potential and will take longer to provide the benefits described above. Also, several portions of these young stands are showing monoculture characteristics and lack adequate species diversity.

The purpose of this project is to develop timber stands which are more productive, healthier and resilient to catastrophic wildfire; and to accelerate the development of mature forest characteristics adjacent to streams in order to provide habitat for late-successional associated wildlife/aquatic species and to meet Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives (Northwest Forest Plan) in a timelier manner.

Proposed Action: The Hood River District Ranger proposes to pre-commercial thin approximately 5,774 acres of young, overstocked plantations (see attached maps). Activity fuels would be reduced to an acceptable level, as specified in the Forest Plan, by a combination of bucking/limbing and by pulling the slash twenty-five feet back away from the roads. After pre-commercial thinning activities, each unit will be reviewed and monitored for fuel loading created from the activity slash. If the analysis indicates that the fuel loading is in excess (greater than 15 to 25 tons/acre) of Forest Plan standards and guidelines (FW-033), a new environmental analysis will be prepared to treat the fuels.



Approximately 1,028 acres are within riparian reserves. Within the riparian reserves, cut trees would be hand piled as needed, to help provide interim down woody structure. Units adjacent to perennial streams (resident fish and non-fish bearing) would have a 20 foot “no cut” buffer from the high water level, except for units adjacent to anadromous fish bearing streams which would have a 30 foot “no cut” buffer

The project would be implemented from 2008 to 2015, as funding becomes available.

Decision to be Made: The Hood River District Ranger will decide whether pre-commercial thinning should be authorized within the identified units on the Hood River Ranger District. The proposed action will be analyzed under a categorical exclusion, category 6: “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction” (FSH 1909.15-2007-1, 31.2, 2/15/07). The analysis for this project will be undertaken by an interdisciplinary team and documented in a project file. If it is determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist (see FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3), the proposed project may be documented in a Decision Memo.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this proposal, please bring them to our attention by **February 25, 2008**. Send comments to Jennie O’Connor, 6780 Highway 35; Mt. Hood/Parkdale, OR 97041. For more information, you may contact Tamara Shannon at (541) 352-6002 or tshannon@fs.fed.us. Electronic comments may also be submitted to comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood-hoodriver@fs.fed.us in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc).

Sincerely,

DAINA L. BAMBE
District Ranger

Enclosures