



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mt. Hood
National Forest

Hood River Ranger District
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File Code: 1950/2430

Date: March 27, 2002

Dear Interested Party:

The Hood River Ranger District, Mt. Hood National Forest, is interested in hearing your input into our Bear Knoll Vegetation Restoration and Transportation Management Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This planning effort was originally begun in 1998 as "The Bear Knoll Planning Area".

The Bear Knoll area, situated within Wasco County's White River Watershed, is approximately 3,570 acres in size. It is located northeast of Highway 26, northwest of forest road 43, and south of forest road 2610. Frog Creek and Frog Creek Ditch run through the project area. The land allocations for this planning area under the Mount Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (MHFP) are B2-Scenic Resource (1,883 acres) and C1-Timber Emphasis (1,687 acres). Included within both land allocations are areas designated as General Riparian areas. The area does not include any Wilderness, RARE II, or other inventoried roadless land. Under the Northwest Forest Plan's Record of Decision (1994), this planning area is within a Tier 2 Key Watershed and includes 75 acres of Administratively Withdrawn land and two 100 acre Late Successional Reserves. The remaining 3,295 acres are identified as Matrix land.

Vegetation Restoration Objectives

The Hood River Ranger District proposes to treat forest vegetation on approximately 821 acres within the Bear Knoll area using six specific silvicultural treatments. The purpose of the forest treatments is to: 1). Reduce the incidence of insects and disease, 2). Improve species composition and timber growth, 3). Meet the long-term visual quality objectives along the Highway 26 corridor, 4). Enhance the Aquatic Conservation Strategy, and 5). Provide lumber and wood fiber. These objectives would be met through vegetative management to promote and /or enhance the desired future condition. This condition would be maintained until the next commercial entry (15-20 years). Specifically, the proposed treatments are:

Older Timber Stands (89 acres) – General Forest/Timber Emphasis Lands

The timber stand growth and vigor is currently declining within these stands. The maximum growth cycle of the trees has reached its peak and is now declining. The majority of the tree component is western hemlock and most of the older trees are infested with Indian paint fungus, which is causing severe decay losses. These conditions will impede or prevent the forest from providing wood products on a fully sustainable basis, based on the capability and suitability of the land.



The proposed action would remove susceptible trees, which exhibit signs of insects, disease, or other problems by using a harvest prescription of shelterwood and mosaic regeneration on approximately 89 acres. These areas would be reforested with a mix of species that are more resistant to the Indian paint fungus.

Older Timber Stands (128 acres) – General Forest/Scenic Viewshed Lands

Highway 26 is a designated scenic viewshed (MHFP) with a Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of foreground retention. Many of the larger and mid size western hemlock trees, within these stands, are beginning to fall over or break off due to Indian paint fungus, root rot, and wind. Some of the mature stands, adjacent to Highway 26, are so narrow and open, that several plantations, from past timber sales, can be seen through the stands. The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of foreground Retention, as seen from Highway 26 and White River, may not be met within these areas for the long term (probably within the next 20-30 years) due to continued stand deterioration from decay and disease. This condition will not meet the long-term goal of providing a naturally appearing landscape of a mature forest with a continuous canopy or provide wood products on a fully sustainable basis.

The proposed action would remove susceptible trees, which exhibit signs of insects, disease, or other problems by creating small group selection openings (two acres and less) on approximately 17 acres. In areas, not seen from the Highway 26 corridor, remove susceptible trees, which exhibit signs of insects and disease, by creating irregular-shaped extended shelterwood units on approximately 111 acres. These areas would be reforested with a mix of species that are more resistant to the Indian paint fungus.

Off-Site Timber Stand (21 acres) – General Forest/Timber Emphasis lands

Ponderosa pine seedlings, believed to have come from Idaho, were planted over 30 years ago to reforest this timber stand. These trees were not locally adapted to the area and are currently not performing as well as those from the local (native) area. They are showing signs of mal-adaptation (snow damage and sparse crowns). This condition will result in a stand of trees with poor vigor, increased mortality/damage, off-site pollen, and likely place the stand at risk of not fully utilizing the growth capacity of the site.

The proposed action would remove the “off-site” ponderosa pine trees, by overstory removal on approximately 21 acres. After harvest operations, the native understory trees would be pre-commercially thinned.

Dense Second Growth Timber Stands (564 acres) – General Forest/Timber Emphasis and Scenic Viewshed Lands

The timber stand growth and health is currently declining due to overstocking (too many trees per acre for the growing conditions). Stagnated conditions and limited species diversity within these timber stands will promote tree mortality. These conditions are and will continue to move these stands away from the desired future condition of providing a healthy, diverse, visually

appealing forest scenery with a variety of natural appearing landscape features as defined by the MHFP and providing forest products on a fully sustainable basis.

The proposed action would reduce stand densities, by thinning, on approximately 564 acres.

Riparian Reserve Restoration (19 acres)

Portions of riparian reserves currently lack the number and minimum size requirements for snags, coarse woody debris, large diameter trees, and other late seral characteristics which help meet and promote the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives. These stands are currently overstocked and the trees are not growing to their full potential because of the inter-tree competition for water and light. Past harvest activities have created large accumulations of slash, in portions of these stands, which is currently inhibiting new conifer establishment. Heavy equipment has damaged the stream channels and altered stream flows. Poorly re-vegetated skid trails also exist within these riparian reserves, which are impeding long term nutrient cycling. Non-native ponderosa pine trees are showing signs of mal-adaptation (snow damage and sparse crowns). All of these conditions are hindering the intent of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy to restore and maintain the ecological health of the watersheds and aquatic ecosystems contained within them.

The proposed action would reduce stand densities, by thinning, on approximately 16 acres to promote tree growth and move the riparian areas toward a late seral condition more quickly. Existing slash concentrations would be redistributed to stabilize the slopes, provide long-term nutrient cycling and more growing sites for reestablishing riparian vegetation, and improving the natural stream flow pattern. Removal of the off-site ponderosa pine overstory is proposed on approximately 3 acres of riparian reserves and pre-commercially thinning the native understory trees.

Transportation Management Objectives

The purpose of the transportation system proposed action, within the Bear Knoll area, is to: 1). Provide adequate access to the proposed forest restoration units and 2). Reduce the excess miles of open road. These objectives would be met by implementing Access and Travel Management objectives to meet the desired future condition. This condition would be maintained until the next commercial timber entry (15-20 years). Specifically, the proposed treatments are:

New Temporary Roads

The existing road system of open roads does not provide adequate access into all of the proposed forest restoration treatment stands.

The proposed action would construct approximately 4.3 miles of temporary native surface roads. These roads would be closed after sale activities.

Reconstructing and Maintenance of Roads

The existing road system of open roads does not provide adequate access into all of the proposed forest restoration treatment stands. Closed roads, previously accessing several of the proposed forest restoration units, will need to be re-opened.

The proposed action would access the proposed forest restoration units by reconstructing approximately 3.2 miles of previously closed roads. These roads would be closed after sale activities. All haul roads, needed by the proposed action, will have normal road maintenance (brushing, blading, and drainage maintenance).

Road Closures

The open road density (2.86 miles per square mile), within the area, exceeds the recommended MHFP standards and guidelines of 2.5 miles per square mile.

The proposed action would close approximately 7.2 miles of open roads.

Enclosed are a vicinity map and a proposed action map to show the location of the area relative to landmarks and roads. The proposed action map identifies the tentative timber stands proposed for treatment, the temporary road system needed to access these proposed projects, and the roads proposed to be closed.

Are there other projects you want the IDT to consider or concerns that you may have with the vegetation treatments and transportation proposals outlined in this letter? If so, please contact Bruce Holmson at (541) 352-6002 Ext. 621. I would appreciate receiving any written comments you may have by May 1st, 2002 at the address identified on this letterhead.

Sincerely,

KIM M. TITUS
District Ranger

Enclosure (2) - Maps