

Record of Decision

Juncrock Timber Sale USDA Forest Service

Barlow Ranger District, Mt. Hood National Forest Wasco, County, Oregon

T. 5 S., R. 10 E., Sec. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, & 18,
T. 5 S., R. 9 E., Sec. 1, 12, 13

Introduction

The Juncrock Planning Area is a 3,865-acre portion of the Mt. Hood National Forest on the east slopes of the Cascade Range, within the White River Watershed, east of Mt. Hood and south of the White River. The majority of the area proposed for treatment is in the Matrix area of the Northwest Forest Plan, and the C1 timber emphasis allocation in the Mt. Hood Forest Plan. These areas are important for meeting the timber management goals of the Northwest Forest Plan.

Management is needed because some stands within the Juncrock Planning Area are declining in health and vigor as a result of competition due to high densities. High tree densities can result in poor growth and a high incidence of disease. There is a need for reducing stand densities to promote the growth of healthy, more vigorous stands.

In other stands, tree species, such as western hemlock, are susceptible to disease. These same tree species are being regenerated in the understory, continuing the spread of disease to future trees. There is a need for reducing the numbers of diseased trees and increasing the percentage of tree species in the stands that are more resistant to disease.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents the analysis of four alternatives to meet this need. Three action alternatives were designed to address the following objectives:

- ✓ Provide commercial wood products for a regulated timber supply consistent with the goals of the Northwest Forest Plan.
- ✓ Improve stand conditions and timber growth by reducing high tree density, insect and diseases.
- ✓ Promote Douglas fir, ponderosa pine and western larch tree species.
- ✓ Maintain a connectivity corridor for the northern spotted owl.
- ✓ Reduce road densities in the planning area.
- ✓ Improve Highway safety by removing leaning, unhealthy trees along Oregon State Highway 216.

Public Involvement

A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (NOI) was published in the *Federal Register* on June 27, 2002.

A scoping letter providing information on the purpose and need, and the proposed action was sent to a list of 50 individuals, organizations, agencies, tribes and congressional offices that might have an interest in the Juncrock Timber Sale. Field trips were held with interest groups to discuss public issues.

Chapter 1 of the FEIS details the following issues that I determined to be significant for the analysis of the Juncrock Timber Sale:

- ✓ Road Construction and harvesting in the area near Trail #487A would replace parts of the trail with a road for the duration of harvest in Units 8 & 9.
- ✓ The proposed action would construct 0.8 miles of road and reconstruct 2.0 miles of road, increasing the miles of road available for use.
- ✓ Cutting large diameter trees could impact biological diversity and social values associated with old growth forests.

These issues were addressed by the alternatives, as described on pages 18-30 of the FEIS.

A letter of availability of the DEIS was mailed to individuals, groups and organizations who commented during scoping, plus others who might have an interest in the Juncrock Timber Sale on August 26, 2003. A Notice of Availability of the DEIS was published in the *Federal Register* on September 9, 2003. The 45-day comment period ended on October 27, 2003. Approximately 241 comment letters were received during that time. Responses to the comments are addressed in Appendix N of the Juncrock Timber Sale FEIS. Copies of the comment letters are available in the project record located at the Barlow District office.

Decision

Based on my review of all the alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative III, the Even-aged Management Approach. My decision includes the road closures, the Best Management Practices (BMP's), and the design features identified in the Alternative description. Implementation of Alternative III will provide commercial wood products, improve the overall health of specific stands and maintain an owl connectivity corridor while directly treating these stands. This Alternative will also close some of the roads used during harvest, treat activities fuels, and plant tree species that are more resistant to disease and insects. A complete description of Alternative III, including BMP's and design features, is included in the FEIS (p. 22-24, 31-33).

The selected alternative will reduce competition by thinning 155 acres, while treating up to six acres located within the riparian reserve. These six acres of riparian reserves are being thinned to maintain long-term riparian reserve stand health, thus maintaining stand connectivity along the riparian reserve. An additional 90 acres will be treated by Individual Tree Selection to create a stand with variable stem densities and canopy

closures; eight of these acres will be in riparian reserves. These eight acres of riparian reserve are being treated to develop a large tree component in less time. This treatment will also increase the percentage of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine and western larch on these riparian reserve acres, which will increase species composition and structural diversity. A total of 305 acres will have a shelterwood treatment to remove trees that have or are susceptible to disease. Approximately 314 acres will be planted with Douglas fir, ponderosa pine and western larch.

Leaning and unhealthy trees along Highway 216 will be removed. An owl corridor will be maintained with a continuous canopy closure between 40 and 60%. A total of 0.80 miles of road will be constructed and 2.0 miles of road will be reconstructed for use during harvest. Approximately 10.2 miles of road will be closed after treatment. Trail #487A will be relocated for the duration of harvest in Units 8 & 9.

This decision will produce approximately 16 million board feet (MMBF) of timber from lands identified as matrix in the Northwest Forest Plan and C-1 (Timber Emphasis) in the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, (LRMP).

Mitigation and Monitoring

My decision includes BMP's, design features, and post-harvest activities associated with Alternative III, as described in the FEIS. The design features we have developed will adequately protect water quality because they are practices that we have used successfully in the past; they are State-recognized BMP's for protecting water quality; or they are based on current research. My decision includes implementation monitoring. This involves checking project layout and contracts for consistency with the FEIS.

Changes between DEIS and FEIS

In response to comments received, additional analysis was done using the DecAID Advisor to re-determine the number of snags per acre to be identified for snags and down logs. DecAID is a planning tool intended to help advise and guide managers as they conserve and manage snags, partially dead trees and down wood for biodiversity (FEIS p. 69 - 70). Using this tool, the change between the DEIS and the FEIS is to select four trees per acre as wildlife trees. This is an increase of one tree per acre from the DEIS. Maintaining a minimum of 4 snags per acre (or live wildlife trees in the absence of snags) and a minimum of 240 linear feet of down logs per acre greater than 20 inches in diameter, will provide 100% biological potential for snag dependant species within the harvested areas and is consistent with research information.

In response to comments, Best Management Practices (BMP's) were reviewed. These practices are identified as a practice or combination of practices that are the most effective and practical means of preventing or reducing the amount of pollution generated by non-point sources to a level compatible with water quality goals. BMP's have been included and identified in the FEIS.

Rationale for the Decision

Alternative III addresses the Purpose and Need and moves the area towards the Desired Future Condition as defined in the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) as amended.

I have selected Alternative III because it is the best alternative for meeting the objectives of reducing competition and improving timber growth because it improves timber stand conditions more than the other alternatives. It is the best alternative for increasing the percentage of disease resistant species because it plants more acres with disease resistant seedlings than the other alternatives. It is the alternative that provides the most wood products consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies now and in the future. Alternative III has the highest present net value and the best benefit/cost ratio of all the alternatives.

I have selected Alternative III because it will avoid or minimize environmental harm. Alternative III avoids impairment of soil productivity and water quality through application of BMP's (Design features, FEIS p. 31-33). Alternative III maintains an owl connectivity corridor by maintaining canopy closures of 40-60% in the corridor. Alternative III protects Trail #487A by relocating it during harvest activities.

Based on comments received there is a concern that the proposed harvest may impact the habitat of plants and animals associated with older forest. The Northwest Forest Plan recognized the conflicting desires for management of public lands and struck a balance between social and biological concerns. Some areas are reserves and other areas like the Juncrock Timber Sale are matrix where timber outputs are expected to be achieved. I have selected Alternative III because it is consistent with the goals of the Northwest Forest Plan and because it is consistent with all of the standards and guidelines providing for green tree retention, snags, and down woody debris.

Alternatives Considered but Not Selected

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives, which are discussed below. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEIS on pages 18-30.

Alternative I - No Action

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area and none of the activities proposed in this FEIS would occur.

My decision not to select the No Action Alternative is based on the analysis that this alternative would not meet the purpose and need outlined in the FEIS. This alternative continues to allow competition and disease to reduce stand health and growth and allows conditions to persist that affect future volume. This alternative would not provide any commercial wood volume toward the goals of the Northwest Forest Plan. Even though no volume would be harvested with this alternative, existing disease and other health

problems would continue to degrade nesting, roosting and foraging habitat and dispersal habitat over the next 10 years.

Alternative II - Uneven Aged Management Approach

Alternative II was identified in scoping and in the DEIS as the Proposed Action. This alternative was designed to address the purpose and need for action and each of the objectives (FEIS p. 18). Alternative II is an attempt to meet conflicting silvicultural and owl dispersal corridor objectives.

My decision not to select Alternative II is based on the analysis that this alternative does not accomplish several of the objectives as well as Alternative III. Alternative II would produce 44 % less volume than the selected alternative and would increase the disease resistant tree species of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine and western larch on 151 fewer acres than the selected alternative.

Alternative IV - Uneven Aged Management approach, With Large Tree Retention

Alternative IV responds to issues raised by some members of the public for maintaining older forest and not building any roads. Alternative IV is similar to Alternative II, except that trees over 21 inches in diameter would not be harvested and longer skid distances and helicopters would be used, rather than constructing or reconstructing roads.

My decision not to select Alternative IV is based on the analysis that Alternative IV would produce 63% less volume than the selected alternative. This is the least volume of any of the action alternatives. Increasing the percentage of disease resistant tree species would occur on only 82 acres, which is 232 acres less than the selected alternative. Alternative IV leaves more disease and infected trees in the stands, which could affect future timber volumes. This alternative, which requires helicopter logging of 2 units is the least economical of all the alternatives. It has the lowest present net value and lowest benefit cost ratio.

Findings Required by Law, Regulation, and Agency Policy

I have determined that my decision is consistent with relevant laws, regulations, and agency policy. The following summarizes findings required by major environmental laws.

National Forest Management Act, 1976

The FEIS sets forth the Forest Plan direction and the goals for each of the Land Allocations in the Juncrock Planning Area (FEIS p. 1). I have determined that the Selected Alternative is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, 1990) as amended.

My decision, including BMP's and Design Features, is consistent with Standards and Guidelines established in the LRMP, as amended.

Alternative III is consistent with direction in the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP) and the Standards and Guidelines established in the NFP, as amended. I have reviewed the details

of the affected hydrologic and aquatic environment (FEIS p. 72, 73, 75-79, Appendix H), which thoroughly describes the existing physical and biological conditions of all aspects of the riparian and aquatic environment, and I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the alternatives (FEIS p. 74, 75, 80, 81, 82, Appendix H). Based on the review of this information and the relevant information in the White River Watershed Analysis, I have determined that the Selected Alternative is designed to contribute to maintaining and restoring the fifth-field watershed over the long term because the riparian treatments would encourage tree growth, reduce competition and would increase future large woody material.

I find that my decision to approve the road actions under Alternative III, including temporary road construction is adequately informed by Roads Analysis and is consistent with current USDA Forest Service transportation system policies. Considering road closures, the decision results in a decrease of the road system in the project area.

The FEIS complies with the Mediated Agreement and the 1988 *Record of Decision for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation FEIS*. The Juncrock Timber Sale will utilize Prevention, Early Treatment, and Correction Strategies to manage the competing and unwanted vegetation.

Suitability for Timber Production and Vegetation Manipulation

This project complies with the consistency standards of 36 CFR 219.10(f). No timber will be harvested from lands not suited for timber production as defined in 36 CFR 219.14. The ability to restock after tree harvest is not a concern. Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, and western larch are expected to be restocked within 5 years after harvest, as needed to meet desired stocking levels. All manipulation of vegetation will comply with the requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b).

National Environmental Policy Act

My decision is consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (1969). The Juncrock Timber Sale FEIS was completed using the guidelines outlined in 40 CFR Part 1500, the USDA Forest Service NEPA Policy and Procedures in Forest Service Manual 1950, and the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15. I believe that the range of alternatives is adequate and that sufficient information was included in the FEIS for me to make a reasoned and informed decision.

Clean Water Act

This project is consistent with the Clean Water Act (1982). BMP's and Design Features for this project will meet the requirements outlined in *General Water Quality Best Management Practices* (PNW Region Nov. 1988). This report was used as a source of management direction for establishing recommendations for this project in relation to water quality issues (FEIS p. 31 - 33).

National Historic Preservation Act, 1966

My decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act. A cultural resource inventory has been completed for the Juncrock Planning Area. All field surveys, certified

by the Archaeologist and reviewed by the Forest Archaeologist, were completed and a heritage resource report has been completed and forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in accordance with 36 CFR 800.5 (B). The SHPO has reviewed the finding of **no effect** to heritage resources and had no objections with this finding.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended

My decision is consistent with the Endangered Species Act (December 1973). The Wildlife Biologist determined that the project **May Affect Likely to Adversely Affect** spotted owls on 217 acres with the loss of Nesting, Roosting and Foraging (NFR) and dispersal habitat. There is a determination of **May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect** spotted owls with the degradation of 239 acres of NFR and dispersal habitat.

In accordance with section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has issued a Biological Opinion (Willamette Province Fiscal Year 1999 Habitat Modification Biological Assessment (BA) for Effect to Listed Species). The FWS concluded that as proposed, the action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated northern spotted owl critical habitat. Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion have been incorporated into the FEIS. This project has no effect to other federally listed species or Federal Species of Concern.

R6 Sensitive Species

The project **May Impact Individuals** but is not likely to impact populations, nor contribute to a potential loss of viability for Oregon slender salamander, Pacific fringe-tailed bat, wolverine, and Pacific fisher. The project has **No Impact** on interior Redband trout (FEIS p. 81). No Region 6 Sensitive Plant species were located in the project area (FEIS p. 52).

Survey and Manage Species

Surveys have been completed for Survey and Manage species. All known sites have been protected (FEIS p. 52, 54, 81)

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) of 2000:

There are no anadromous fish species or their habitat present in the Juncrock Timber Sale (FEIS p. 75 & 76), there will be **No Effects** to Essential Fish Habitat for Chinook salmon (listed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act) and as a result consultation was not required.

Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands

There are wetlands in the Juncrock Planning Area. These wetlands are associated with the Clear Creek Ditch, as well as riparian reserves. A total of 14 acres of riparian reserve will be treated with the selected alternative. Design Features to protect wetlands and riparian reserves are included (FEIS p. 31-33). Pursuant to Executive Order 11990, there will be no loss of wetlands from any action associated with my decision.

Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management

Pursuant to Executive Order 11988, actions associated with Alternative III are not located on floodplains and the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the actions associated with my decision will not result in conditions that affect floodplains.

Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice

There will be no disproportionate adverse impacts to human health or environmental effects from the selected alternative on low-income populations, minority populations, or Indian tribes (FEIS p. 104-107).

Identification of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is defined by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) as the alternative or alternatives that promote national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA Section 101. This section of the law encourages Federal Agencies, "...to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans."

In accordance with CEQ regulations, I have considered all alternatives in this analysis and have identified Alternative II and Alternative III as the environmentally preferable alternatives. These alternatives best forward NEPA's goals to attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment and achieve a balance between population and resource use. Both alternatives provide commercial wood products in an environmentally sound and economically feasible way, to help sustain local and regional economies, improve stand conditions, and maintain a connectivity corridor for the northern spotted owl. Both alternatives shift road densities towards the desired future condition and both alternatives improve public safety along Highway 216.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Any individual or organization that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Any appeal of this decision must be in writing and fully consistent with the content requirements described in 36 CFR 215.14. The Appeal Deciding Officer is Linda Goodman, Regional Forester. An appeal should be addressed to the Regional Forester at any of the following addresses. Postal: ATTN.: 1570 APPEALS, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623; Street location for hand delivery: 333 SW 1st Ave, Portland, OR (office hours: 8-4:30 M-F); fax: 503-808-2255; or Email: appeals-pacificnorthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

The Appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the date legal notice of this decision was published in the Portland *Oregonian*.

Implementation Date

If the project is not appealed, the USDA Forest Service will not implement The Juncrock Timber Sale for five business days after the close of the forty-five day appeal period, which starts on the date the notice of this decision appears in the newspaper of record (*The Oregonian*, Portland Oregon).

If an appeal is filed, the USDA Forest Service will not implement the Juncrock Timber Sale until fifteen business days after final resolution of the appeal by the Appeal Deciding Officer.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

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Responsible Official:

/s/ Gary L. Larsen
GARY L. LARSEN
Forest Supervisor

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