

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
Hilynix Forest Health Environmental
Assessment and Biological Evaluation**

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

Introduction

The Hilynix Forest Health Environmental Assessment (EA) and Biological Evaluation (BE), released for a 30-day public review on August 20, 1998, documents the two alternatives considered in detail. Based on the analysis in the EA and public comment received, the Forest Service has reached a decision, documented in this Decision Notice, on the management for the Hilynix Planning Area. The project area is located on the Barlow Ranger District, three miles west of the Bear Spring Workcenter and is entirely on National Forest System lands.

Decision

Based on the analysis in the EA/BE and consideration of public comments received to date, I have decided to implement Alternative II, the Proposed Action, except to drop the treatment of Unit 1. This decision will implement timber management activities, including timber harvest, reforestation, and fuels treatments in the Hilynix Planning Area. It includes construction of temporary roads and closure of several miles of existing road after reforestation activities. My decision also includes the Mitigation Measures identified on page 30 of the EA. The project would be implemented in the years 2000 - 2005 and will treat forest vegetation on 1,026 acres of the total 3,875 acre planning area.

Major design features of the decision are:

- Vegetation Treatment:
 - Cathedral Development Thinning, for a total of 163 acres
 - Late Seral Salvage, for a total of 194 acres. Unit 1 of this treatment type will be dropped, as it currently meets the characteristics of a cathedral stand structure.
 - Multi-story Development, for a total of 175 acres.
 - Recovery Harvest, for a total of 124 acres.
 - Rehabilitation Harvest, for a total of 44 acres.
- Retain healthy grand fir and Pacific silver fir to manage for the C3, category 1 lichen species.
- Maintain a minimum thirty foot "no cut" buffer around known sites of C3, category 1 lichen species.
- Plant openings, including landings, with Douglas-fir, western larch, western white pine, and noble fir.
- Rip all compacted ground, including landings and skid trails.
- Selectively fall whips in designated units before fuel treatments, leaving healthy trees of all species at desired levels

- Designate "no cut" areas and remnant leave trees meeting the requirements of the Northwest Forest Plan.
- Leave three snags/acre and 360 linear feet/acre, where it is available. Where it is not available, green trees will be designated as leave trees.
- Use a ground based logging system.
- Use existing skid trails whenever possible.
- Scarify and waterbar skid trails and landings and plant with designated seed mix.
- Conceal temporary road and skid trail entrances by ripping the second 100 feet and placing rock and debris on the road.
- Cut snags which are a hazard to open roads.
- Grapple pile and burn slash.
- Plant openings associated with the scenery resources to a higher proportion of western larch.
- Control gophers in regeneration areas if necessary.

Decision Rationale

I have decided to implement Alternative II because it best meets the desired objectives to improve timber stand health in the area. The treatments in this decision will maintain the existing healthy mature stands, accelerate the development of immature stands into healthy mature stands, and regenerate mature stands with epidemic disease infestations. It will also provide the most effective open road density and best meet the Forest Plan Standard and Guide to provide wood fiber on a regulated basis. Other important considerations in my decision were: harvest of mature stands, hydrologic recovery, and Threatened and Endangered species, survey and manage species, recreation, wildlife, and regeneration harvest in mature stands.

Forest Health

This decision will treat a total of 1026 acres to maintain or move them toward a healthy, mature stand structure. In addition, 394 of those acres will have substantial improvements in disease resistance and higher stand resiliency. Many of these stands have reached climax conditions where the climax species is western hemlock, which has a high, self-sustaining level of disease. There is a moderate level of disease in the Douglas-fir. These treatments will keep many components of a mature stand, and maintain or move the stands towards a fully functioning mature and healthy state as fast as possible.

Road Management

This decision will reduce road density to 2.16 miles per square mile. Currently open road density is 3.09 miles per square mile. Mt. Hood National Forest Plan Standards and Guides sets 2.5 miles per square mile as the limit for these land allocations. Road closures will eliminate vehicle access to some dispersed camp sites. Additional camp sites will be provided at the road closures junctions. These road closures will also eliminate administrative vehicle access into some areas, but use of gates on key roads will allow for essential and emergency access.

Wood Fiber Production on Suited Acres

This decision will contribute an estimated 29,000 cubic feet (14.5 MMBF) of wood fiber to the PSQ as defined in the Mt. Hood Forest Plan.

Hydrologic Recovery

This decision improves the watershed condition in the long term. The actions and impacts are consistent with the ACS objectives. The Aggregate Recovery Percentage (ARP) for Hilynx has been recalculated, using the Upper White River as the appropriate fifth field watershed. The existing condition in 1998 is 81. The ARP, after the decision is implemented, is calculated for the year 2000, also is 81.

Threatened and Endangered Species

This decision will have no effect on individuals or populations of bald eagles, peregrine falcons, or Canada Lynx, as there is no habitat in the planning area for these species.

The decision may effect individual owls but is not likely to adversely effect activity centers. This will comply with the NWP. It should not adversely effect populations. This decision complies with the Willamette Provincial Fiscal Year 1998 Habitat Modification Biological Assessment for Effects to Listed Species, initiated August 15, 1997.

This decision will have "No Effect" on listed and proposed fish species.

Survey and Manage Species

Two species of survey and manage lichens are found in the project area. I believe the design features and mitigation measures in the decision will provide protection for these species. For example, project design for Unit 23 includes keeping all large overstory remanent trees north of Road 4310 for protection of the likely parent source of *Nephroma occultum* for the site tree that was found. The majority of the remnants will be left on the south side of Road 4310.

Recreation

This decision will close roads, and limit dispersed recreation. However, the method of road closures, leaving the first 100 feet of closed roads open, will provide adequate dispersed camping opportunities.

Wildlife

This decision may impact individuals of some species but is not likely to impact populations of any sensitive wildlife species.

Regeneration Harvest in Mature Stands

The majority (2,450 acres) of the mature stands in the planning area are functioning properly. Maintenance of mature stand structure is a concern on about 168 acres because of the poor health of the

overstory and understory. These stands have either begun to collapse or the natural regeneration is highly susceptible to disease. They will not retain a mature stand structure over the long-term (20-40 years).

I believe that regenerating these mature stands will have a negligible short-term impact on the availability or distribution of this stand structure in the planning area and that there will be a long-term benefit.

Consistency With Applicable Plans, Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the following environmental laws, which are relevant to the proposed activities. Some laws require specific coordination with regulating agencies.

Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990)

The proposed action was developed to meet direction in the Forest Plan. The proposed action will utilize methods to meet or exceed standards and guides.

Scenic viewsheds along U.S. Highway 26 will remain as retention in the foreground and middleground and partial retention in the background. Timber activities will be consistent with scenic viewshed objectives. Timber Emphasis management areas will have a mixture of mature timber, second growth and plantations. Disease resistance and stand resiliency is improved. Disease resistant trees species will be planted. The development of cathedral stand characteristics or mature late seral multistory are accelerated. Roads will be closed.

Northwest Forest Plan (NWP) (1994)

The Hilynx Planning area is classified as Matrix land in a Tier II watershed. Timber harvest and other silvicultural activities can be conducted on Matrix lands. A watershed analysis was completed before any major activity could be started in the White River Watershed.

Aquatic Conservation Strategies

As part of the NWP, nine goals and objectives for Aquatic Conservation were developed. The Hilynx Forest Health Project is in compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) based on: 1. its link to watershed analysis, 2. its consistency with ACS objectives, 3. use of a sixth field watershed as the appropriate scale, and 4. the review of its effects on hydrologic function using appropriate methodology.

White River Watershed Analysis

The White River Watershed Analysis (WRWA) was completed in August of 1995. This document is a systematic procedure to characterize the aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial features within the watershed. Information gathered during watershed analysis was used to refine riparian reserve boundaries, prescribe land management activities, and develop monitoring programs.

Endangered Species Act

This act provides for the protection and conservation of threatened and endangered plant and wildlife species. A biological evaluation and assessment consistent with the requirements of this act was prepared

and is included in the body of the EA. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has concurred with the determinations based on this analysis.

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act requires consideration be given to the potential effect of federal undertakings on historic and prehistoric cultural resource sites. Region 6 of the Forest Service entered an agreement in 1995 with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. In accordance with this agreement, a survey was conducted on the Hilynx Project Area. This survey resulted in a determination of No Effect.

Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 (PL 92-500)

This act led to the use of Best Management Practices as the non-point source pollution control tool. Hilynx Forest Health Project will not enter any riparian areas. This design feature will maintain water quality that meets the requirements of this act.

Clean Air Act

This act establishes standards for particulate matter in the air. This project meets the standards as described in this act. Slash generated by the Proposed Action will be grappled, piled, and burned.

National Forest Management Act

This act establishes guidelines for National Forest Management. This project is consistent with these guidelines as follows.

- Consistency With the Forest Plan
 - The proposed activities were designed to be consistent with the Forest Plan.
- Suitability For Timber Production
 - The timber stands proposed for harvest are suitable for timber production. Stands are located in either the C1 (Timber Emphasis) or B2 (Scenic Viewsheds) Land Allocations.
- Openings
 - The proposed timber harvest will create openings from 1 acre to less than 40 acres in size.
 - Restocking will be necessary. Past restocking efforts in the area have a 80 percent survival rate.

Alternatives Considered

One other alternative was considered in detail, Alternative I - No Action. This Alternative would have allowed the current conditions to persist. Loss of wood fiber values would continue.

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Significance (40 CFR 1509.27) and have determined that the decision is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to Section 102 (2) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 is not required.

The finding is based on the following factors:

The analysis documented in the EA did not identify any individually significant adverse short- or long-term impacts.

There will be no effects on public health and safety. Potential conflicts between log hauling and public traffic on major access routes are minimized by appropriate advisory signing and/or traffic control.

The decision will not result in any effects to unique geographic characteristics of the area, cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas. No parkland, prime farmland or wild and scenic rivers are found in the project area. No adverse affects to cultural resources and historic places are expected; the project area was surveyed for cultural resources and none were found. No adverse effects are expected to riparian areas; riparian areas were excluded from treatment areas.

The analysis completed and comments received did not identify any significant controversy or disagreement concerning effects of the decision on the quality of the human environment. However, there was not total agreement with the analysis of effect in the EA on the protection of the survey and manage lichens species found in the project area. Considerable effort was made in the planning process to identify and protect survey and manage species. I believe the project design, buffers and no cut areas included in my decision provide adequate protection for these species and that a "highly controversial" situation as define by the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1508.27 (b)(4) does not exist.

The decision will not result in any effects on the human environment which are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The decision implements the Mount Hood Forest Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan, management area direction and it does not establish a precedent for future action. The activities are not connected to any other action. Implementation of this decision will not trigger, nor is it part of a larger action.

The environmental analysis shows the decision will not result in any known significant cumulative or secondary effects.

Biological Assessments on the effects to threatened or endangered plant and animal species have been completed and incorporated into the EA. There will be "No Effect" to Threatened and Endangered plants. The project will have "No Effect" on listed and proposed fish species. The decision may effect individual owls but is not likely to adversely effect activity centers.

This decision in compliance with relevant Federal, State and local laws passed for the protection of the environment, as described previously.

Public Involvement

Scoping was initiated in the fall of 1997, when a notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Analysis on this area was published in the fall issue of "Sprouts", the quarterly publication for the Mt. Hood National Forest. Notices were also published in the Spring and Summer, 1998, issues of "Sprouts" A public meeting was held in Zigzag, Oregon, at a project fair for the Zigzag Ranger District. An Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist visited the project area with the planning team. The scoping letter was sent to approximately 120 agencies and interested people in June of 1998. A "show me" trip was held for interested publics on August 7, 1998.

There were six responses to the scoping letter. Comments received included responses which are positive about the balanced approach taken with the sale program. Additional comments were about the ecologically based project, and moving toward good stewardship. Full support was given for closing as many roads as possible.

The EA was released for a 30-day public review period on August 20, 1998. The purpose of the comment period is to provide the opportunity for the public to review and comment on proposed actions prior to decision. During the comment period one public field review was held. The time and date for the review was identified in the letter that accompanied the EA. Seven members of the public attended the field review.

Approximately 130 copies of the EA were mailed out for public review and eight comment letters were received. Five of the comments supported the projects "balanced approach to ecosystem management". Two of the comments requested that Unit 1 be dropped from the proposed action because the stand may already meet the desired condition. Two of the comments concerned roads. One was concerned that access be maintained and the other requested as many be closed as possible. The possible impact to rare lichens was the focus of one comment.

Administrative Appeal Rights

The decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. Any written notice of appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14. To appeal this decision, an appeal must be postmarked and submitted to the Appeal Deciding Officer with 45 days of the date of legal notice in the Oregonian. The Notice of Appeal must be filed with: Regional Forester, Attn. Appeal Deciding Officer, 333 SW First Street, Portland, Or. 97208-3623.

For further information, contact Becky Nelson, Forester, P.O. Box 67, Dufur, Or. 97021, or telephone number (541) 467-2291

Approved by: /s/ Gary R. Larson (for) Date: 09/30/1998
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FOREST SUPERVISOR
MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST