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Defenders of Mt. Hood Oppose 12,000+ acres of Logging on Public Lands

The U.S. Forest Service has released the Environmental Assessment for the proposed 12,725 acre Crystal Clear Timber Sale in Mt. Hood National Forest, triggering a 30-day public comment period. The proposal by the Forest Service asserts the purpose is to “provide forest products where there is an opportunity to restore resiliency to forested areas and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire”. For the last nine months, Bark, Portland’s leading forest defense organization, has sent dedicated staff and volunteers out to survey the areas proposed for logging to determine whether or not the stated purpose is valid.

“Much of what the Forest Service has described as the ‘desired future conditions’ which logging would create - such as stand density and percentage of canopy cover - already exists in these areas” said Bark’s Forest Watch Coordinator Michael Krochta. “It is disingenuous to claim that logging will improve forest health in areas that are recovering well from past logging or in many cases have never been logged.”

The rationale presented for logging the Crystal Clear project area also includes an argument that conditions in the forest could generate “uncharacteristic wildfire”, and logging to reduce fuels is therefore necessary. “It’s just not logical. The Forest Service is stating that the vast majority of the area is within the ecologically expected fire cycle and at the same time claiming it needs to be logged to reduce the chance of uncharacteristic fire.” stated Brenna Bell, Bark’s NEPA Coordinator.

Bark’s close reading of the Forest Service’s Environmental Assessment and the ecological history of fire in the area shows that 97% of the moist, mixed conifer forest is within the historical range of variability of fire frequency, severity, and pattern. In the dry conifer forest, 39% is within its historical cycle of fire. “The majority of the area is within its natural fire regime, contains large, fire resilient trees, and historically burned with mixed-severity fire”, Bell said. The entire project is located within Critical Habitat for the threatened Northern Spotted Owl, and would remove 2,551 acres of high-quality owl habitat, as well as 233 acres of designated habitat for Pine Martens. This project would also build 39 miles of roads. There are no communities in the area.

Earlier this month, 150 Bark volunteers spent two weeks camped out near the proposed timber sale groundtruthing over 80 individual logging units across the entire project area. Bark’s Forest Watch program collected hundreds of photographs, measurements, notes, and GPS data about plant and animal species diversity and other conditions in the forest. They confirmed the presence of Survey and Manage species that earlier Forest Service surveys had missed, as well as stands of legacy Douglas Fir and old growth Western Hemlock throughout the area.

Public comments on the proposed Crystal Clear Timber Sale are due by end of business day, September 22, 2017. Comments should be directed to Casey Gatz, Natural Resource Planner Mt. Hood National Forest. Email: comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood-barlow@fs.fed.us. For more information visit www.bark-out.org. Bark’s mission is to transform Mt. Hood National Forest into a place where natural processes prevail, where wildlife thrives and where local communities have a social, cultural, and economic investment in its restoration and preservation. Since 1999.

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