

Wildcat Thinning

Mt. Hood National Forest Zigzag Ranger District

The purpose of this project is to commercially thin young forest stands to achieve multiple objectives:

- Increase health and vigor and enhance growth that results in larger wind firm trees; (*This action is needed, because overstocked second-growth stands are experiencing a reduction of growth due to overcrowding.*)
- Enhance biological diversity by variable density thinning that changes vertical and horizontal stand structure and brings more sunlight to the forest floor to establish ground vegetation;
- Provide forest products consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies now and in the future.

The project is located in sections 9 and 16 of T. 3 S., R. 6 E., WM, Clackamas County, Oregon. Large portions of the Wildcat area were logged many years ago and a subsequent fire burned through the area. Portions were planted and portions were reforested by aerially seeding from a seed source that originated off-Forest. The units are approximately 65 years old except for unit 3, which is a 45-year-old plantation. The project is in the C1 – Timber Emphasis land allocation. No Riparian Reserves would be thinned.

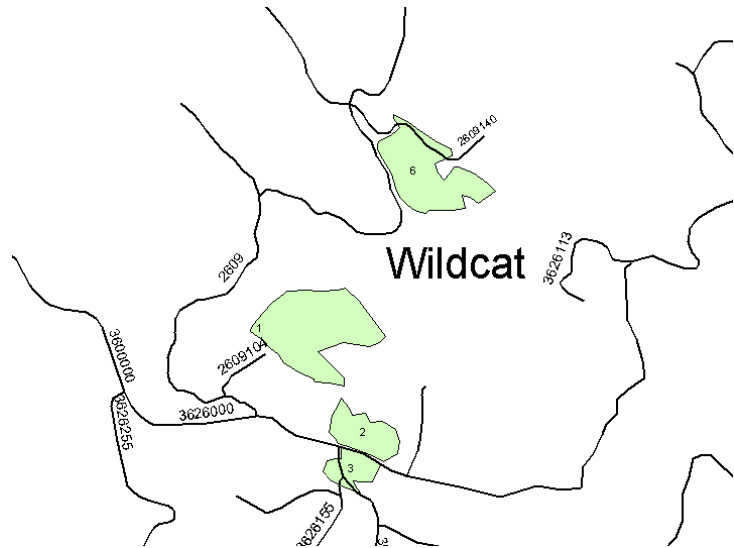
The proposed action is to do variable density thinning on approximately 70 acres.

- Trees to be cut are generally smaller than 20 inches in diameter with an average of approximately 16 inches.
- 500 feet of temporary road will be constructed (an extension of road 2609104 into unit 1). The temporary road will be obliterated.
- Ground based logging systems will be used. Site-specific design criteria (5d) will minimize the expansion of Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use into the thinning units.
- Variability – Thinning will generally remove the smaller trees, but the objective is to introduce structural and biological diversity through variable spaced thinning. Diversity and variability will be introduced in several ways:
 - Leave tree spacing will vary from 80-140 trees per acre.
 - Leave trees will include minor species.
 - Small gaps and skips will be created.
 - Leave trees will include some trees with the elements of wood decay.
 - Leave trees will include some live trees where their crowns touch certain key snags.
 - All non-hazardous snags will be retained.
 - All existing down logs will be retained and key concentrations of woody debris in the older decay classes will be protected.

Project File – Other details of the project can be found in the project file. This includes a list of standard practices such as seasonal restrictions, snag management, erosion prevention measures, and practices to reduce the risk of spread of invasive plants.

Public Scoping

A notice was sent to a list of interested groups and individuals. Comments were received offering a diversity of public opinion. Some voiced support for the project while others suggested that the project be cancelled or modified or that an EA should be written.



Potential for Categorical Exclusion

The proposed action is covered by category 31.2-12, described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, July 6, 2004. This category is for “harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing. Examples include but are not limited to: commercial thinning of overstocked stands to achieve the desired stocking level to increase health and vigor.” This proposal is to thin up to 70 acres of second-growth. One tenth of a mile of new temporary roads would be constructed.

No extraordinary circumstances have been identified by the interdisciplinary team of resource scientists that analyzed this proposal.

- The following resources were considered: threatened, endangered or proposed species or their critical habitat or sensitive species; flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; American Indian religious or cultural sites; archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.
- Biological Evaluations were prepared for sensitive, threatened or endangered wildlife, fish and botanical species.

Formal consultation with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service concerning the **northern spotted owl** has been completed for this project. The Biological Opinion written by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and dated March 29, 2005 concluded that this project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the northern spotted owl or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.

- The project is in a Critical Habitat Unit (OR-10). The proposal is not in nesting/roosting/foraging habitat but it is in dispersal habitat, which will be temporarily

degraded by thinning. The effects determination for habitat modification will be Not Likely to Adversely Affect. Long-term benefits will outweigh short-term effects.

- The new information that has been recently published about northern spotted owls has been considered. The new information would not lead to a change in the effects determination.

The proposal will have no effect on threatened or endangered **anadromous fish** or Essential Fish Habitat established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Consultation is not required.

There will be no impacts to sensitive species or survey and manage species that would cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability for any proposed or sensitive species.

The project will have no adverse effects on flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; American Indian religious or cultural sites; archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.

Forest Plan

The proposed action is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines of the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan (Forest Plan).

- **Aquatic Conservation Strategy** – The project is not in riparian reserves and is therefore consistent with the Forest Plan as amended by the 2004 Record of Decision to Clarify Provisions Relating to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.
- It is consistent with standards for threatened, endangered and sensitive species; management indicator species, noxious weeds, soils, hydrology, water quality, air quality, heritage resources, scenery and timber management.
- It is consistent with the National Forest Management Act regulations for **vegetative management**. There will be no regulated timber harvest on lands classified as unsuitable for timber production (36 CFR 219.14) and vegetation manipulation is in compliance with 36 CFR 219.27(b).

Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Design Criteria

1. **Soils:** No operation of off-road ground-based equipment would be permitted between November 1 and May 31. This restriction applies to the ground-based portions of harvest units. It also applies to ground-based equipment such as harvesters or equipment used for fuels treatment, road reconstruction or landing construction. This restriction may be waived if soils are dry or frozen or if operators switch to skyline or other non-ground based systems. *This is a BMP and it implements Forest Plan standards and guidelines FW-022 and FW-024.*

2. **Snags and wildlife trees:** Snags would be retained in all units where safety permits. To increase the likelihood that snags would be retained, green trees will be marked as leave trees where their live crowns touch certain key snags. Certain live trees will also be selected as leave trees that have the “elements of wood decay” as described in the DecAid advisor. This may include trees with features such as dead tops, broken tops and heart rot.

Sixteen live trees per acre greater than 10 inches diameter with “elements of wood decay” would be retained where available. Of these trees, 8 per acre should be greater than 20 inches diameter where available. *This implements Forest Plan standards and guidelines as amended.*

3. **Down Woody Debris:** Down logs currently on the forest floor will be retained. Additional down woody debris will be generated by the timber sale. This would include the retention of cull logs, tree tops, broken logs and any snags that would be felled for safety reasons. Some trees with root disease may be retained that would eventually fall providing another source of down wood.

Where feasible, key concentrations of woody debris in the older decay classes would be protected from disturbance by avoiding moving logs or yarding over them.

Tree tops and limbs will generally be retained in the unit. This restriction may be waived after consideration of potential residual tree damage, soil cover, nutrient cycling, fuel loading and wildlife habitat. *This implements Forest Plan standards and guidelines as amended.*

4. To reduce **erosion** from timber sale activities, bare soils will be revegetated. Grass seed and fertilizer will be evenly distributed at appropriate rates to ensure successful establishment. Mulch may be used on slopes greater than 20%. Effective ground cover will be installed prior to October 1 of each year. *This is a BMP and it implements Forest Plan standard and guideline FW-025.*

Native plant species will be used to meet erosion control needs and other management objectives such as wildlife habitat enhancement. Appropriate plant and seed transfer guidelines will be observed. Non-native species may be used if native species would not meet site-specific requirements or management objectives. Non-native species would be gradually phased out as cost, availability, and technical knowledge barriers are overcome. Undesirable or invasive plants will not be used. *This implements Forest Plan standard and guideline FW-148.*

Grass seed would preferably be certified by the states of Oregon or Washington or grown under government-supervised contracts to assure noxious weed free status. In certain cases non-certified seed may be used if it is deemed to be free of State of Oregon listed noxious weeds. *This implements Forest Plan standard and guideline FW-148.*

When straw is utilized, it will originate from the state of Oregon or Washington fields which grow state certified seed, or grown under government-supervised contracts to assure

noxious weed free status, or originate in annual ryegrass fields in the Willamette Valley. In certain cases, straw or hay from non-certified grass seed fields may be used if it is deemed to be free of State of Oregon listed noxious weeds. *This implements Forest Plan standard and guideline FW-148.*

5. **Logging Systems** – *These are BMPs and implement Forest Plan standard and guideline FW-022.*

- a. Avoid the use of ground based tractors or skidders on slopes generally greater than 30% and mechanical harvesters on slopes greater than 40% because of the risk of damage to soil and water resources.
- b. Mechanical harvesters and forwarders will be required to work on a layer of residual slash and the operator will place slash in the harvester path prior to advancing the equipment.
- c. In some units, ground-based logging is proposed for areas that have been previously harvested with ground-based systems. Existing temporary roads and landings would be reused and existing skid trails would be reused where they do not alter surface hydrology.
- d. There is a concern about OHV use in this area. The following practices are designed to minimize the risk of OHV use becoming established on skid trails and landings inside the thinning units:
 - o Where units 2 and 3 touch open system roads and heavily used OHV trails, have a 15-foot no-harvest buffer. Do not allow equipment in this area. Directionally fall trees away from the no-harvest buffer. Do not cut brush or remove slash from the no-harvest buffer.
 - o Obliterate temporary roads and landings used for this project and block access with a combination of berms, slash, logs, rootwads etc. to discourage use by OHVs.

6. **Roads** – *These are BMPs.*

During the wet season, log haul will only be permitted on asphalt and rocked roads when conditions would prevent sediment delivery to streams.

7. **Invasive plants** - All off-road equipment is required to be free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds prior to coming onto National Forest lands. Timber sale contracts and service contracts will include provisions to minimize the introduction and spread of invasive plants. Invasive plants are any plant species not native to a particular ecosystem that are likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health. These provisions contain specific requirements for the cleaning of off-road equipment. *This implements Executive Order 13112 dated February 3, 1999.*

8. **Firewood** will be made available to the public at landings where feasible. *This is an opportunity to contribute to Forest Plan - Forest Management Goal #19, and provide forest products consistent with the NFP goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies.*
9. **Monitoring:** *This Implements Forest Plan and NFP monitoring requirements.*

Prior to advertisement of a timber sale, a crosswalk table will be prepared to check the provisions of the Timber Sale Contract and other implementation plans with this document to insure that required elements are properly accounted for.

During implementation, Timber Sale Administrators monitor compliance with the Timber Sale Contract which contains provisions for resource protection including but not limited to: seasonal restrictions, snag and coarse woody debris retention, stream protection, erosion prevention, soil protection, road closure and protection of historical sites.

Post harvest reviews would be conducted where needed prior to post harvest activities such as slash treatment and firewood removal. Based on these reviews, post harvest activities would be adjusted where needed to achieve project and resource objectives.

Monitoring of noxious weeds and invasive plants would be conducted where appropriate to track changes in populations over time and corrective action would be prescribed where needed.

Monitoring is also conducted at the Forest level. For example, water quality is monitored for both temperature and turbidity at several locations across the Forest.

Contact Person

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