



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Pacific  
Northwest  
Region

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**File Code:** 1570/1950  
**Date:** December 11, 2014

Brenna Bell  
NEPA Coordinator/Staff Attorney  
Bark  
PO Box 12065  
Portland, OR 97212

**CERTIFIED MAIL – RETURN  
RECEIPT REQUESTED  
NUMBER: 7010 1870 0000 4162 3637**

Dear Ms. Bell:

This letter is in response to your objection (#15-06-00-0002-218(B)) to the draft Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the North Fork Mill Creek Revised Project, located on the Hood River and Barlow Ranger Districts, Mt. Hood National Forest. I have read your objection and reviewed the project record, the draft DN, and the final Environmental Assessment (EA). My review of your objection was conducted in accordance with the regulation at 36 CFR 218 (2013).

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

On September 10th, 2014 the legal notice was published announcing the Predecisional Administrative Review (Objection) Period for the draft DN/FONSI and final EA for the North Fork Mill Creek Revised Environmental Assessment. The draft DN selected Alternative 2, which includes the following:

- Treating 1,009 acres within the Mill Creek watershed.
- Restoration thinning on 107 acres that were unburned or had low severity fire.
- Restoration thinning on 146 acres that had moderate to high severity fire.
- Hazard tree removal on 134 acres.
- Reforestation on 622 acres.
- Restoration thinning and hazard tree removal would use both ground based and cable logging systems and may require follow-up activity fuels treatments.
- Less than one mile of temporary roads will be constructed.
- The use of two temporary roads that already exist on the ground (approximately 0.3 miles total).
- Associated fuels reduction activities and riparian prescriptions will be implemented, such as: handpiling, pile burning and mastication.

### **OBJECTION ISSUE DISCUSSION**

Specific to your objection, you raised issues regarding the purpose and need, range of alternatives, existence of contracts, economics, impacts of post-fire logging to the Northern spotted owl, and original premise of the project. An objection resolution meeting was held on December 3, 2014. At the meeting, I heard and understood your concerns about post-fire salvage and about the history of the project. Although I believe the dialogue we had was productive, no resolution was reached. I believe that the Responsible Official's decision space was well defined in the EA and that her draft decision is based on sound rationale surrounding compliance with the existing contracts that were affected by the fire.

I am enclosing a written response to your objection issues. My final response to the Forest Supervisor is summarized below.



**RESPONSE**

Based on my review of the record, final EA, response to comments and draft DN, I conclude the following:

- The draft decision clearly describes the actions to be taken in sufficient detail that the reader can easily understand what will occur as a result of the draft decision.
- The draft decision considered a range of alternatives that was adequate to respond to the Purpose and Need and included options to modify and terminate the existing contracts. The purpose and need and alternatives considered in the final EA reflect a reasonable range of alternatives, consistent with law, regulation and policy.
- The draft decision is consistent with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
- The draft decision is consistent with all policy, law, direction, and supporting evidence. The record contains documentation regarding resource conditions and the Responsible Official's draft decision is based on the record and reflects a reasonable conclusion.

With regard to your concerns about the impacts to Northern spotted owls, I did note that the final Biological Opinion was received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during this review process. It contains several terms and conditions and a conservation recommendation that will need to be included in the final decision. It also helps to further clarify potential impacts to the Northern spotted owl. By copy of this letter, I instruct the Responsible Official to include the terms and conditions and conservation recommendations set forth by the Biological Opinion in the final decision. I also instruct her to include the cumulative effects information in the Biological Opinion in the final decision to further clarify why there are no measureable cumulative effects to the Northern spotted owl.

This concludes my written review of the project and is the last administrative review by the Forest Service or the Department of Agriculture [36 CFR 218.10(b)(2)]. By copy of this letter, the Responsible Official may sign her decision after complying with my instructions above, and then notify interested and affected persons in accordance with the regulation at 36 CFR 218.12 and 36 CFR 220.7(d).

Sincerely,

*/s/ Rebecca Lockett Heath (for)*

JAMES M. PEÑA  
Regional Forester

cc: Lisa A Northrop  
Janeen S Tervo  
Jennie O'Connor Card  
Michelle Lombardo  
Debbie Anderson  
Adam A Felts

Enclosure