



Bark

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Rudy Hefter
Cascades Resource Area Manager
Salem District BLM
1717 Fabre Road SE
Salem, OR 97306

Dear Mr. Hefter,

Bark is concerned about the planned Beeline and McDowell Creek Timber Sales in the Cascades Resource Area of the Salem BLM, which would commercially thin 990 acres of matrix and Riparian Reserve lands. Our members regularly use the Salem BLM and other public lands for a variety of purposes and have a strong interest in maintaining the ecological integrity of our public lands. The proposed project threatens this interest.

Reasonable Range of Alternatives

Under NEPA, the Environmental Assessment (EA) is required to provide a detailed statement of alternatives to the proposed action, and the environmental impacts of both the proposed action and the alternatives. 42 USC § 4332, 40 C.F.R § 1508.9. An agency must look at and discuss every reasonable alternative within the range dictated by the nature and scope of the proposed action. Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. BPA, 117 F.3d 1520, 1539 (9th Cir. 1997). The EA prepared for the Beeline and McDowell Creek timber sales fails to give an adequate discussion or analysis of alternatives to the proposed action. The scope of alternatives is only adequate if the alternatives presented permit the decision-maker a reasoned choice. Part of the purpose and need of this project, as stated in the EA, is "to maintain and develop a safe, efficient and environmentally sound road system" and "reduce environmental effects associated with identified existing roads within the project areas." (EA 1.2) Surely there are other action alternatives that could better meet this purpose and need, and have meaningful differences to the environment, than simply the action item presented. An example would be to decommission all roads after project completion, including restoration measures such as ripping the roads and replanting. This would have drastic and meaningful differences in environmental effects, certainly furthering the purpose of a healthy forest ecosystem far more than the action alternative, which reopens old roads, some of which have undergone extensive re-vegetation and proposes no plan for mitigating the effects of off-highway vehicle (OHV) abuse. By not providing any concrete alternatives to the proposed project, or any discussion of the environmental impacts of an alternative, this EA does not meet the requirements of NEPA. As such, additional analysis should be prepared that contains adequate discussion of alternatives.

Cumulative Impacts

The justification for combining these two projects into one EA is inappropriate. Even without considering the potential conflict of analyzing the environmental impacts of two different actions with one document, the sales are more than an hour drive apart. It is nearly impossible for the public to adequately respond to this proposal, especially considering the Beeline Project has been mostly inaccessible by car due to weather for most of the open comment period.

As the crow flies, these two projects are more than 60 miles apart. As acknowledged in the EA, these projects are at significantly varied elevations (EA 46). The BLM states several places in the EA that significant wildlife differences exist between the two project areas (EA 31, EA 46). Bark believes that the presence of the Oregon Slender Salamander in the Beeline Project is enough cause to prepare a more thorough evaluation of the impacts logging will have on this species' habitat. The Beeline and McDowell Creek projects are in distinctly different watershed analysis areas. If it was appropriate to combine the similar watersheds, we would save considerable time to have one watershed for all of northwestern Oregon. Or all of Oregon. Or all of the West. But we know scientific reasoning does not behave so neatly. Site-specific analysis of these complex forests are absolutely necessary to the integrity of planning commercial logging projects.

Bark's members come together in passionate commitment to the forests nearest to Mt. Hood's watersheds. We see the intensive cumulative impacts of private industrial logging and public lands timber management as a direct threat to our important water sources. The area surrounding the Beeline project has been so heavily logged there are signs everywhere of soil structure beginning to erode and sediment runoff from hillsides. Invasive weeds such as Scotch broom, are prolific and threaten all temporary lack of native plants around new culvert replacements. Habitat fragmentation is a reality in this area and will continue with increased harvest. Any further logging in this area, particularly from public lands stewards, deserves rigorous, site-specific analysis.

Aquatic Conservation Strategy

Since the EA was released, the court has ruled that the 2004 amendment of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) was illegal. The BLM should revisit the analysis to ensure compliance with ACS Objectives at all spatial scales.

Employing no analysis for effects determinations with regards to ACS raises significant problems for meeting NEPA requirements for "best available science" and other statutory requirements. The EA fails to disclose how the increased peak flows produced by the Beeline timber sale will maintain and restore the instream flow regime within these degraded basins as required by the Aquatic Conservation Strategy. The EA also fails to acknowledge the wide array of scientific information that details impacts of logging on stream systems, including the relationship between increased flows, unstable channels, and increased sedimentation. Sediment impacts associated with increased peak flows are not disclosed.

One of the objectives of the ACS Objectives is to "Maintain and restore the distribution, diversity, and complexity of watershed and landscape-scale features." (RMP, p. 6) Logging projects leave forest stands hotter, drier, more susceptible to fire, blow down, drought, disease, and invasive species. ACS Objectives also state the intent to "Maintain and restore instream flows sufficient to create and sustain riparian, aquatic and wetland habitats and to retain patterns of sediment, nutrient, and wood routing." (RMP, p. 6) The roads associated with logging projects are responsible for innumerable problems with sediment, compaction, fragmentation, wildlife destruction and disruption, erosion, and human abuse issues such as dumping, illegal OHV use, and fire. The healthy diversity and complexity that these stands already contain will be destroyed if this project

goes forward. Especially unit 3A, which is particularly wet, contains large snags (which are not properly buffered in this project), much large downed woody debris, a lush and thriving forest floor, lots of natural clearings, habitat for sensitive species, and an array of biodiversity.

The Beeline project area is located at elevations which have the potential to increase peak flows during winter or spring storm. Portions of Clear Creek and the Clackamas River are both identified as having moderate water quality problems, which may be affecting general water quality, fisheries and for the Clackamas, aquatic habitat. One of the stated probable causes is erosion. The Beeline/McDowell Creek EA by ignoring the consequences from peak flow erosion, and relying on untested mitigation assumptions, fails to demonstrate that the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy will be attained.

Other than stating that the Beeline/McDowell Creek EA conforms to the 2004 ROD, in consideration of ongoing litigation around the 2004 supplemental, there is no information about how this project is adhering ACS standards. This continuing lack of detail leaves confusion around how the BLM plans to mitigate the already intensive problems with sediment, road runoff and health of the landscape with regards to watershed quality.

Roads and Culvert Replacement

With regards to the Beeline Project Area, Bark is pleased to see there will be no new road building. There are more than 4,000 miles of roads that web throughout the forests in Mt. Hood National Forest. Any ability to mitigate new roadbuilding around Mt. Hood should be a priority on all public land.

The included map was not entirely clear where the culvert replacements would occur, but many of the culverts in the Beeline area are in need of replacement and Bark appreciates efforts and investment in keeping these problems from increasing. Indeed the culverts we assumed would warrant replacement were often plugged from sediment runoff from private industrial logging or, simply were built too small to facilitate the water capacity, causing pooling and erosion and the openings of the culvert. More information in the EA about what techniques would be used to replace the culverts would be helpful to know. We have documented hundreds of improper culverts throughout the Mt. Hood watersheds. Will the culverts be replacements of what already exist? Will the culverts that are currently too small in diameter be replaced with larger openings? Will the replacements compensate for erosion to avoid further pooling on the inlet and excessive dropoff on the outlet? Where inboard ditch culverts are in need of replacement, what measures will be taken to ensure that road runoff is not directly draining into streams?

The road system in this area is also in great need of repair after so much use for logging in the area. We appreciate the agency's recognition that road maintenance is imperative to mitigate further impact on the environment. However, we have grave concerns for the economic value of this logging operation when such large costs are burdened by the BLM. Private logging companies are already benefiting from the roadwork on their own holdings. Why should tax payers support the further subsidy of public lands logging, by investing more resources into this crumbling road system?

The EA claims, "Other roads would be closed (ripped, seeded and blocked) following harvest." (EA 43) Then it asks the reader to refer to section 2.2.1 for more information. However there is no information about this road obliteration. Road obliteration has the potential to be more detrimental in the short term, than leaving the road to decay. This section of the proposed plan absolutely needs more description and explanation of implementation. Which roads will be obliterated? How will

they be ripped? What will they be reseeded with? How will they be blocked? How will this closure be enforced against off-road vehicle abuse?

Off-Highway Vehicles

We have continuing concerns about the increasing problem of off-highway vehicle (OHV) abuse. As one of our volunteers witnessed in Section 10, these vehicles are actively penetrating the remaining forests and utilizing dozens of access points onto the system of user-created trails. The EA states an incredibly oversimplified response to this problem and the potential increase due to logging; "Areas within proposed harvest units which are subject to unauthorized use by motorized vehicles would be individually evaluated to determine the best combination of treatments...Skid trails and other potential access points that could result in new unauthorized use by motor vehicles would be blocked and/or impassable." (EA 18) What other opportunity does the BLM propose for effective evaluation of solutions than in the environmental assessment? This lack of planning before the action is completed violates the very principle of including sound science in prior documentation. It has been proven repeatedly, even from within agency, that OHVs have become one of the largest threats to our forest's health. What does the BLM plan to use for "blocking" or making the roads "impassible"? Berms? They'll become mere obstacles that are entirely the appeal for many riders. Gates? If there is no way to get around the gates (which there usually is) a soldering iron will keep the party going. Tree planting? Obstacle course. Bark has consistently witnessed all of these actions and recommends that this project not move forward without an in depth plan for road closures and effective enforcement of OHV abuse.

Colton Water District

The Colton Water District supplies water to approximately 1,200 citizens. The intake for this supply is on the Jackson Creek. In their source water assessment, the District states "One potential contamination source, managed forest clear cut areas, was identified within Colton Water District's drinking water protection area...The clear cuts are located throughout the protection area and pose a relatively high risk especially when located within the 'sensitive areas.'" (*Source Water Assessment Summary Brochure, Colton Water District 1*)

The road leading to Section 10 crosses Jackson Creek 5 times within the allocated sensitive area. This road should be obliterated and the drinking watershed protection zone should be extended. The water is taken from a point less than 2 miles downstream from proposed road crossings. It is unacceptable that the BLM did not assess the impacts of this in its EA.

Access and Public Involvement

Bark, as a group of concerned citizens, has frustration with the continued unwillingness to provide adequate access to agency planning. Several factors have prevented us from adequately understanding this project. The majority of the roads leading the public lands in question were routinely closed due to private holdings gates. Even when opened for pass, signs advertised a threatening possibility of their closure without restraint. Inevitably, when projects are proposed to public scrutiny through the winter months, we run the risk of logging on public lands occurring without the public actually understanding the potential degradation. Because the Beeline project was at a high elevation, snow and ice have made the roads impassable. After months of attempting to reach the units, we were discouraged to continually find the gates closed, as well. We are supportive of the road maintenance that is planned for the roads leading to this area. However, if the public is expected to foot the bill for this maintenance then it is totally unacceptable to have public lands decisions being made from behind a gate which is dictated by another entity. Please, in the future, consider using signage and communication with other parties that these gates must stay open for, AT LEAST, the period you are actively inviting the public to comment.

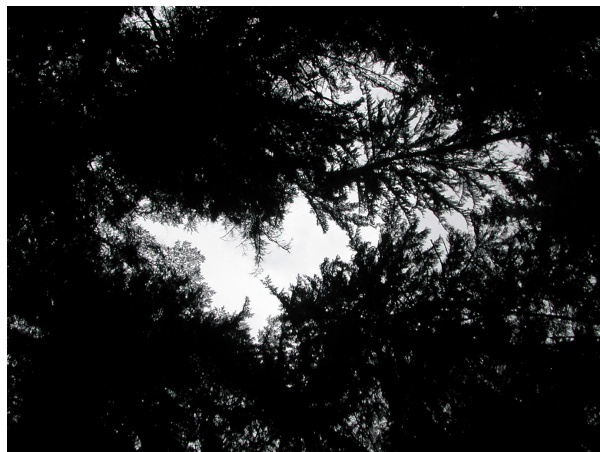
When we were able to reach the project units of Beeline, we were further discouraged from witnessing this project when we found the lack of marking and flagging on the boundaries of the units. Bright yellow tags with “BLM Restoration Project” and a vague directional arrow were mounted periodically on the roads. Many of these tags have worn or were obscured by homemade signs to motorized recreation gatherings. The units themselves had almost no tags or flagging. It is a sad day when the only way to tell where public lands logging is planned because it is the only standing forest in view. We can be empathetic to the difficulty in reaching these units and thus, for scoping, are willing to overlook the lack of marking. However, when we receive an Environmental Assessment from the BLM, we would expect to see some previous form of communication (flagging, tags, spraypaint, etc.) used for the multiple perspectives required to produce this document. In its absence, we begin to lose trust in the process. Was this project adequately surveyed and the potential for excessive negative impacts to the forest analyzed?

Another point at which we considered the chance that the agency was not exhausting their resources in planning this project is the consistent referencing to a source; “2007 Timber Sale Thinning EA.” Bark did not receive this document, nor is it listed on agency web archives. With the grandiose scope of these two projects distance between each other, we wonder what the scope of such a nebulous titled document could be. Bark also finds it disconcerting that several of the sections are sourced to this document, though there is little attention to explaining how this document offers site-specific prescriptions for these areas.

Fire Risk & Blowdown

BLM management practices are supposed to provide for windfirm forest stands that are resistant to wildfire. However, the proposed thins will increase the risk of fire and blow down. Logging this area will result in drier conditions, and increase the levels of slash. The refuse from logging operations have never resulted in sound timber management. In the EA, there are several references to debris and the use of slash piles. The EA states that “after 3 to 5 years the fine fuels would be decayed in most of the units and the risk of surface fire would decrease to near current levels.” (EA 7) What can be expected to happen if fire should sweep through this area within the next few years? Western Oregon and, in particular, the proposed area has seen an increase in fire activity. The Blister Fire from just last year is not far. The dangerous cocktail of irresponsible debris piles seen on private land and the reckless use of all-terrain vehicles in the area is cause for concern.

When taken into the environmental effects, the EA shows results of “Modeling Predictions of Fire Regimes for the Project Areas.” (EA 55) There is no discussion of the basis for these predictions. What does this prediction include for consideration? As in Unit 3A, there is a unique and healthy multi-storied forest and not the canopy crowding that the EA claims. Please show where else the Severity designation is culled from. When a Bark volunteer was recently hiking through Units 10A and B there was active off-highway vehicle use in the units. If debris and slash is left to its own for the coming years in an area with mechanized recreation and user-created campsites, such as seen near Unit 17, surrounded by intense private industrial logging operations, it seems unlikely that a nuanced



discussion of canopy coverage is enough to prevent this forest from burning beyond recovery, post-logging.

Added to this concern is the discussion of the BLM's plan for ground based logging operation and the use of a shovel swing. "When not operating on approved skid trails, these machines would be required to operate on top of a slash and brush mat that would prevent all but incidental soil compaction and displacement." (EA 21) There is no further discussion of this technique and its efficacy. While we commend the BLM for taking soil compaction measures, please show how this seemingly futile, but risky technique works. The potential for gas from the machinery being left behind on this debris pile and igniting seems quite likely.

Blowdown is also likely given that every unit shares at least one boundary with a private clearcut or former public lands project. This excessive dead forest mass will only further the imbalance of the forest and leave it susceptible to more severe burning. Climate change, which is already increasing the summer drought conditions across the region, is only expected to continue and get more severe, increasing the fire risk further. There is a high concentration of roads in the vicinity, and the area is frequently used as a shooting range. Given that most forest fires are human started on or near roads, it seems unwise to create drier conditions with increased levels of highly flammable fuel loads in the area. The heavily logged private lands in the surrounding area are already at relatively high risk of fire.



This picture at left is from private land looking into Unit 3A. Notice the signs of post-logging burns on the private land and the smaller debris left behind. The boundary of this forest is already very likely going to suffer blowdown. Left without the wet, green conditions of the forest, there is little to contain a wildfire from burning the forest beyond recovery.

Bureau Sensitive Species

BLM analysis cites studies regarding the Oregon Slender Salamander which are all either ongoing, in review or unpublished (EA 50). This is not sufficient data to support your claims. Unit 17, where the salamander was found is surrounded by private holdings which have been plundered over the years. Walking up the road leading to Unit 17 passes another area with a significant level of coarse woody debris (CWD) and suitable habitat for this species. However, like so much of the remaining forest in this area, illegal off-highway vehicle trails spider between the trees and have greatly impacted the forest floor. The Upper Clear Creek Watershed Assessment states, "It is anticipated that the populations will continue to be fragmented and isolated except for those areas on federally managed lands within riparian reserves..." (pg. 46) It is the responsibility to harbor these remaining areas for the important habitat they offer to these species.

A survey's finding in the Beeline project of one of the world's largest and most rare shelf fungi, *Bridgeoporus nobilissimus* stands for further concern regarding the agency's lack of rigor in planning this sale. An Oregon State University survey stated, "Threats to *Bridgeoporus nobilissimus* are those actions that disrupt stand conditions necessary for its survival. These include activities that cause removal of host trees or modification of microclimatic conditions required for fruiting and survival, such as logging, road, trail, and campground construction (Hibler & O'Dell 1998). Most

of the occurrences are in working National Forest lands and may be subject to eradication by removal of the existing timber.”

(http://oregonstate.edu/ornhic/survey/bridgeoporus_nobilissimus_or.pdf)

This species is particularly vulnerable because of low reproduction and slow growth. Although a 50-ft buffer is a step in the right direction, we are concerned that the overall degradation of the forest from logging will have an impact on the presence of this rare species. In particular, the thick stands along the roads on the boundary of Unit 17 are currently preventing the level of rampant motorized vehicle recreation to push into this forest. If this proposal moves forward, we see the potential for this buffer to be inadequate for protection.

Northern Spotted Owl

When listing the analysis that was considered for Northern Spotted Owl (NSO), the BLM stated “the reports did not find a direct correlation between habitat conditions and changes in NSO populations, and they were inconclusive as to the cause of the declines.” On further reading of one study referenced, *Scientific Evaluation of the Status of the Northern Spotted Owl* (Sustainable Ecosystems Institute, Courtney, *et al.* 2004) this is, in fact a misleading summary. As so many other credible articles have concurred, this article states past and current timber harvests have led to a larger decline than was expected. While the article does conclude that habitat fragmentation does not appear to have led to increased predation on the species, it does not, as the EA implies agree with other agency generated analysis that there is no direct correlation between the loss of habitat and the decrease in population.

Conclusion

The Beeline project should not be pushed forward without much more data provided to the public, proving it will not cause irreparable harm to the environment. In particular and at the least, we request the following actions be taken:

- Drop unit 3 (shown in photo) from this project. It is one of the remaining healthy forests and must be protected.
- Obliterate all road segments crossing Jackson Creek.
- Provide data as to culvert replacements.
- Provide a detailed plan of how to mitigate off-road vehicles in this area.
- Create larger buffers around Bureau Sensitive Species.



Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Harwood
Program Director
Bark