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May 11, 2011

Cindy Enstrom
Cascade Field Manager, Salem BLM
1717 Fabry Rd, Salem OR 97306

RE: Protest of Gordon Creek Thinning III Final Decision and Decision Rationale

Dear Ms. Enstrom:

Pursuant to 43 CFR 5003, Bark hereby protests the Gordon Creek Thinning III Final Decision and Decision Rationale from April 27, 2011 which is based on the Gordon Creek Thinning Revised EA #OR080-07-05 dated March 2009. Bark has submitted detailed comments on this project for both the original and the Revised EA which are part of the administrative record.



Decision Title: Final Decision and Decision Rationale for Gordon Creek Thinning III.

Project Description: This is the third phase of the Gordon Creek project. It proposes approximately 453 acres of thinning, construct approximately 0.26 mile of new roads to accommodate logging equipment and log transport, improve approximately 1.01 miles of road to the minimum standard necessary, renovate approximately 3.11 miles of existing road. Remove the log fill and install one temporary culvert at the stream crossing in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of T.1S. R.5E. section 1. Install one temporary stream crossing on private land in T.1N. R.5E. section 36.

Project Location: T. 1 S., R. 5 E., Section 1, Willamette Meridian, Multnomah County, Oregon.

Date of Decision: April 27, 2011

Name of Deciding Officer: Cindy Enstrom, Field Manager, Cascades Resource Area, Salem BLM

Introduction:

Bark's mission is to bring about a transformation of Mt. Hood National Forest and surrounding BLM forests 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. At this time, we represent over 5,000 supporters who work in, recreate around and depend on drinking water from Mt. Hood National Forest. Bark volunteers and members hike in the planning area, have grown up going on field trips to the adjacent educational trail, and have an interest in the future of the watershed.

Bark believes that the Gordon Creek Thinning III Final Decision (Decision) will cause unnecessary damage to the Gordon Creek watershed. Bark commented on both the Original EA and the Revised EA in a timely and substantive manner.

Bark urges BLM to cancel the auction for this timber sale and avoid creating contractual obligations that will impede constructive dialog to resolve differences over this sale.

Statement of Reasons

Bark appreciates the work that the BLM has done to address concerns about this project that have been raised by the City of Portland, Corbett, and Oregon Wild. The increase riparian buffers around Corbett's water intake are a decided improvement upon the initial action proposals.

While acknowledging the BLM's actions and improvements on this project, Bark still retains significant concerns about the road "improvements" and stream crossings projected for Section 1. This protest focuses on those concerns.

Road Building

In its EAs and Decision Notice, the BLM euphemistically refers to much of the road work in Section 1 as "improvement" and "renovation." Upon visiting the site, it became clear to us that much of the old road beds have long stopped functioning as roads and the work needed to be done to make them haul-worthy rises to the level on new road construction. As we walked the old roadbeds of 1-5E-1 and 1N-5E-36 it became clear that they have significantly revegetated and, in some cases, were holding significant amounts of water in the old road-bed. The conclusions in the Decision Notice (DN) do not reflect the realities on the ground and do not provide adequate assurance that the proposed project will not significantly impact the hydrology of the Gordon Creek watershed.



Heavily revegetated old road-bed



As Bark noted in our earlier comments, we are strongly opposed to the building of new roads anywhere in the Mt. Hood area. If roads have already been successfully reclaimed by the forest – actively or passively – opening the road up again should be recognized as new road construction.

The Phase III DN acknowledges that it will build .26 of new road. It does not, however, acknowledge the extent of work that will be needed to “improve” and “renovate” an additional 4.12 miles of road – including building two new stream crossings. In line with the BLM playing down the impact of the road building, it is telling that maps in both the EA and the Revised EA (REA) label the two stream crossings as “new road”. Yet in the map in the DN, these crossings got downgraded to “road improvements.” The EA’s definition of road improvement is to “upgrade an existing road to a higher design standard than the original design.” (REA at 17). There are definitely no existing roads currently crossing the two creeks. In addition, the crossing of N.Fork Gordon creek is going to have to move off of the existing road alignment at least 15-20 feet to access the proposed crossing site. This is clearly building a new road, not improving an existing one.



40 ft wide stream crossing & old road bed. N.Fork Gordon Creek



Proposed stream crossing, 20 ft from old road bed.

Sixty-five miles of road already exist in the Gordon Creek watershed and approximately 25% of the roads are within 200 feet of a stream. (Gordon Creek WA 1-8). The Salem District RMP directs the district to “[r]educe road density by closing minor collector and local roads in areas or watersheds where water quality degradation, big game harassment, or other road-related resource problems have been

identified.” (RMP 64). That the roads in question have already revegetated to the point that they should no longer be considered roads when determining road density means Phase III will increase road density in the area beyond that acknowledged in the Decision Notice. In response to this concern being raised in comments, the DN brushed the issues aside by stating that open road densities are low due to numerous locked gates and USFS closures that prohibit motor vehicle use. (DN at 19). Again, this does not address the reality on the ground. Putting a gate on a road does not make its impacts (to hydrology, soils, wildlife, etc.) go away. Gates do not decrease density. Natural revegetation, such as that found in Section 1, does. The conclusions in the DN might make sense on paper, but do not hold up when applied to the actual environmental impacts of the project.

The DN incorrectly states that “all alternatives meet decision factor f” – to reduce erosion and subsequent sedimentation from roads. It further states that “under the action alternatives, roads will be maintained, reducing the risk of erosion and sedimentation associated with the existing road system. Road construction, improvement, renovation and stabilization will take place during dry conditions.” Again, this does not reflect the reality on the ground in the project area. While it is true that unmaintained roads may increase sediment in a watershed, this does not seem to be the case at all in the Gordon Creek watershed where the old roads are significantly revegetated and the work needed to build new roads in the old road location will be hydrologically disruptive. In addition, as noted above, the two stream crossings are new roads, and the rerouted landing needed to cross the N. Fork of Gordon creek is as well. It is thus arbitrary and capricious to state that road construction will have no hydrologic connectivity to streams, and no stream crossings (DN at 13). The DN’s conclusion that “no pathway will exist for delivery of sediment to streams generated by road construction or use” is not supported by the facts on the ground.



The successfully reforested 1-5E-1 “road”



Trees falling and water pooling in the “road” 1N-5E-36

The DN further states that existing roads will only be used, including renovated roads, where they are stable and on stable ground. (DN at 19). Our experience walking the “roads” in Section 1 was that in many places the upslope hillside was slumping into the roads, with downed trees fallen along the length of the road. This does not present a compelling picture that the roads are “stable.”

Finally, the DN did not include any hauling restrictions on Road 1N-5E-36 where it crosses the Stream Protection Zone. Perhaps this was included in the Protest Resolution that the BLM entered with Oregon Wild, but it seems like an important omission from the DN. The “road” as it crosses the SPZ is not adequate to haul logs on, and as it is not identified as a stretch to be “improved” we can only assume that hauling will be prohibited on this stretch. Please confirm this understanding.

Conclusion

With regards to these ongoing concerns, we hereby request a stay on the Gordon Creek Thinning III project. If you have further questions, please contact me. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brenna Bell, Esq
NEPA Coordinator