
File Code: 1950
Date: January 26, 2016

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Hood River Ranger District on the Mt. Hood National Forest (the Forest) has identified you as an individual, agency, or organization that has shown interest in the planning process for the Polallie Cooper Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project proposal to reduce the fire hazard in order to protect life, and property and to restore forest conditions that are more resilient to wildfire. Several segments of private land are located immediately adjacent to the border of this planning area. The Cooper Spur Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area is listed as a high risk and priority for treatment within the Hood River Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

The Polallie Cooper planning area is identified as federal lands that have been substantially altered from their historical range at patch and landscape scales in the Hood River CWPP. Fire progressing to or from this area can have deleterious effects upon two major watersheds, Crystal Springs Watershed Special Management Unit and City of the Dalles Municipal Watershed on the Barlow Ranger District. The planning area includes approximately 7,300 acres in Township 01S Range 09E/10E and Township 02S Range 09E/10E, please see the attached maps.

Project Overview

Fire suppression efforts over the past 100 years, favorable climatic conditions, vegetation growth and dead fuel resulting from insects and diseases have altered stand composition and structure, and increased tree and brush densities. The high density of the stands contributes to mortality of trees because of competition for nutrients, water and sunlight. Insects and diseases are more likely to kill trees that grow in dense, crowded conditions. Dwarf mistletoe-infected trees, diseased trees, insect-killed trees, and down fuel are creating continuous fuel ladders from the ground to the tree crowns. The majority of National Forest System lands in the planning area have been mapped as Condition Class 3, indicating these lands have missed multiple natural fire events and now contain unnaturally high fuel situations.

Because of these conditions, there exists the threat of a large scale disturbance outside of the range that historically occurred on the landscape that could threaten both NFS land and adjacent privately owned lands. The overall purpose of this proposal is to reduce the fire hazard in order to protect life and property and to restore forest to conditions that are more resilient to wildfire on National Forest System (NFS) lands. This planning area is the last untreated wildland urban interface (WUI) on the eastside of the Mt. Hood National Forest.

The desired future condition of the project is to develop an uneven-aged stand with canopy closure that would allow fire behavior to change from crown fire to surface fire. The desired future condition for the upland and riparian vegetation treatment areas is a multi-layer canopy



with large diameter trees, well-developed understory, more than one age class, and snags and down woody debris. Within areas in the WUI and dryer sites, the desired future condition is to develop an uneven-aged stand with canopy closure that would allow fire behavior to change from crown fire to surface fire. Achieving this desired future condition would assist in meeting the overall goals of the LUAs and the CWPP within the planning area and recommendations within the watershed analyses as described below.

Overall, the Proposed Action includes treating approximately 2,830 acres within the East Fork Hood River Watershed. The Proposed Action includes sapling thinning, plantation thinning, and recently unmanaged stand thinning. In addition to these treatment blocks, follow-up fuel treatments would be applied to reduce the fuel loading. A suite of fuel treatments would be applied depending on site, on the surface fuel, and desired future condition. In addition to the vegetative and fuel treatments, 1.6 miles of road would be changed from maintenance level (ML) 2 to 1, or “administratively closed”.

The Preliminary Assessment for this project is now complete. It is available for viewing at the Mt. Hood National Forest website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mthood/projects>.

Healthy Forest Restoration Act

The District is analyzing the proposed fuels reduction project in an Environmental Assessment (EA) under the authorities of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). The Healthy Forests Restoration Act was signed into law on December 3, 2003 with one of the purposes to improve the capacity on Federal lands to plan and conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects aimed at protecting communities, watersheds, and certain other at-risk lands from wildfire.

The Polallie Cooper project qualifies under Title 1 - Hazardous Fuel Reduction on Federal Land of the HFRA. It is authorized as described in Section 102 of the HFRA because it is within a wildland urban interface area on federal land identified in a community wildfire protection plan.

HFRA authorized fuel projects must be designed to retain or culture old-growth forest structure and large trees according to provisions in the law. Additionally, authorized projects must be conducted consistent with all current laws or policies governing forest management in the area. HFRA authorized projects require collaborative planning, monitoring and assessing forest and rangeland health, and the Act contains provisions that streamline the environmental review of a project.

The Hood River Stewardship Crew has been collaborating with the interdisciplinary team on this planning area since 2012, which meets the requirements and intent of HFRA. Through a series of field trips as well as office meetings, the group developed a set of recommendations for the Polallie Cooper planning area. In August 2014 the Hood River Collaborative Group submitted recommendations for the planning area, which have been reviewed in the development of the Proposed Action.

The recommended treatments are designed to meet the objectives of reducing hazardous fuels, creating defensible space in the communities around federal land and increase forest resiliency. Those recommendations are available on the project website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mthood/projects>.

The collaborative group is composed of representatives from: federal and state agencies, watershed councils and local agencies, environmental groups, non-governmental organizations, timber industry, private citizens, and neighboring landowners. The collaborative group recommended developing fuels treatments that would restore forest stand health and allow for fire to play a more natural role. After receiving the recommendations, District personnel began the interdisciplinary process of developing a detailed fuels reduction and restoration proposal that would meet the objectives for the area and incorporate many of the recommendations of the collaborative group.

Opportunity for Public Comment

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days from January 26, 2016.

The Hood River Ranger District is holding a public meeting to discuss the Polallie Cooper Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project as required by the HFRA. The meeting will take place on February 10, 2016 from 5:00-7:00 p.m. in Hood River, Oregon at the Hood River Fire Department located at 1785 Meyer Pkwy. The meeting will be to discuss this proposal, provide maps and answer questions. It will also be a time for us to hear any concerns you may have for this proposal or its effects.

On March 27, 2013, a final rule revising 36 CFR Part 218 was published in the Federal Register and became effective on that date. The new rule replaces the previous appeal rules defined in 36 CFR 215, and expands the use of the pre-decisional objection process used for projects authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. The new rule provides the public an opportunity to comment and express concerns on projects before decisions are made, rather than after. The Forest Service believes this aligns with our collaborative approach to forest management and increases the likelihood of resolving those concerns, resulting in better, more informed decisions.

The new rule provides the public an opportunity to seek higher level review of unresolved concerns before the project decision has been signed, rather than having to appeal a signed decision. Individuals and entities who have submitted specific written comments at this stage will be eligible to object. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted written comments specific to the proposed project or activity unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the opportunities for comment. Comments received during this public review of the Preliminary Assessment will be considered, and a revised EA and draft Decision Notice will be released for a 30 day review and objection period. For more information on 36 CFR Part 218, see the Federal Register, Volume 78, No. 59, March 27, 2013.

Written comments should be submitted to the Responsible Official, Janeen Tervo, District Ranger c/o Casey Gatz, 6780 Highway 35, Mount Hood/Parkdale, OR 97041 or by FAX: (541) 352 - 7365. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00AM to 4:30PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments can be provided to Casey Gatz, only during normal business hours via telephone (541) 352-1255, or in

person. Those submitting electronic comments must put the project name in the subject line, and must either submit comments as part of the e-mail message or as an attachment only in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf) or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf), and must do so only to the following e-mail address: comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood-hoodriver@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses, will be rejected.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments by electronic means to ensure that their comments have been received. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218.

Anyone wishing to obtain additional information on this project should contact Casey Gatz at 541-352-1255 or cgatz@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



JANEEN TERVO
District Ranger

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