

**Gibson Insect and Disease Briefing Paper**  
**Hood River Forest Collaborative**  
**August 10, 2023**

### Project Location

The Gibson Insect and Disease planning area is located in the central portion of the Hood River Ranger District. It is bordered to the west by Forest System Road (FSR) 1700000; to the east by the Government Flats fire footprint; to the north by the Forest boundary, and to the south by the FSR 1700662. The North Fork Mill Creek-South Fork Mill Creek, Upper Mosier Creek, and Neal Creek are the primary subwatersheds included within the planning area. The whole of planning area lies within the Upper Mosier Creek-Columbia River, Hood River, and Mill Creek-Columbia River watersheds. The planning area is characterized by a mix of moist and dry mixed conifer plant communities.

The planning area is approximately 4,122 acres. Up to 3,000 acres of the planning area would be treated. The scoping process will determine which areas should be treated. The planning area is located in: Township 1 South, Range 10 East, Section 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 22, and 23; and Township 1 South, Range 11 East, Sections 19, 20, 5, 6, 7, and 18.

### Background

The Mt. Hood National Forest has experienced widespread tree mortality in the recent past. Given climate change projections of increasing temperatures and drier summers, forest conditions are at a higher risk for mortality as the period of summer water deficit lengthens and becomes more severe. Additionally, these conditions have caused landscape-scale areas on the forest to be at high risk of insect and disease epidemics.

Landscape-scale areas were designated on Mt. Hood National Forest to address insect and disease threats under Section 602 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6591a), as added by Section 8204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-79). These landscape-scale areas are experiencing decline in forest health based on annual forest health surveys and are at risk of substantial tree mortality over the next 15 years based on the National Insect and Disease Risk map.

A total of 580,048 acres were designated on Mt. Hood National Forest by the Forest Service Chief on April 16, 2019. These designated areas exclude Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and non-Forest Service inholdings. The request letter, designating letter, and corresponding map can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/farm-bill/area-designations>.

Since the Gibson project is located within this designated area, the project may be considered under Section 603 of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, which established a categorical exclusion for qualifying insect and disease projects. For a project to be considered under Section 603, it must meet the following requirements:

- The project is limited to areas in the wildland urban interface (WUI) or, if outside the WUI, must be in condition classes 2 or 3 fire regime groups I, II, or III.
- The project is not located: in congressionally designated Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas; in areas where the removal of vegetation is restricted or prohibited by statute or by Presidential proclamation; or in areas where the proposed activities would be inconsistent with the applicable Land and Resource Management Plan.
- The project's number of acres treated does not exceed 3,000 acres.
- The project does not include the establishment of permanent roads, but may allow for necessary maintenance and repairs of the existing permanent road system and may allow for the construction of temporary roads that would have to be decommissioned no later than three years after completion of the project.
- The project is developed and implemented through a collaborative process.
- The best available scientific information is considered to maintain or restore ecological integrity, including maintaining or restoring the structure, function, composition, and connectivity.
- The project maximizes the retention of old growth and large trees, as appropriate for the forest type, to the extent that the trees promote stands that are resilient to insect and disease.

### Draft Proposed Action

In order to address insect and disease threats within the project area, the proposed action would reduce stand density on approximately 3,000 acres (see Tables 1 and 2). The planning area to be evaluated is about 4,122 acres. The scoping process will determine the 3,000 acres to be treated. The proposed action would move density levels to a more desired condition. All treatment areas would use a mix of thinning from below and intermittent thinning, with the intention of prioritizing the retention of the largest and healthiest trees available within the stands. A variety of methods, including mechanical and non-mechanical (i.e., hand- crews), would be used. These methods include but are not limited to: precommercial thinning, commercial thinning, and a full suite of fuels treatments available, (including, but not limited to mastication, piling and prescribed burning). Non-commercial units would be treated with precommercial thinning and fuels treatments. Commercial unit treatments may include a combination of precommercial thinning, fuels treatments, and commercial thinning.

The proposed action would not construct any system roads. Road maintenance would occur on all roads needed along a timber haul route, and temporary roads are anticipated to be needed in order to facilitate activities. These temporary roads would be decommissioned within three years of project completion.

Project design criteria will be developed by the IDT as part of the proposed action.

## Mt. Hood National Forest Plan and Northwest Forest Plan

The Gibson planning area is made up of several Management Areas (land use allocations) which are described in detail in the Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as amended.

**Table 1. Mt. Hood National Forest Plan Land Use Allocations in the planning area.**

<b>Land Use Allocation</b>	<b>Approximate Acres in Planning Area (Percent)</b>
B2 Scenic Viewshed	170 (4%)
B6 Special Emphasis Watershed	6 (<1%)
B10 Deer Winter Range	326 (8%)
B5 Pine Marten/Pileated Woodpecker*	394 (10%)
C1 Timber Emphasis	3,621 (88%)
Total Planning Area Acres	4,122

\*The B5 land use allocation overlaps with C1. This is why total acres appear to exceed 4,122.

The Northwest Forest Plan land use allocations for the planning area are Matrix and Riparian Reserves. There are no Late Successional Reserves (LSR) in the planning area. The majority of the planning area consists of Matrix lands as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Northwest Forest Plan Land Use Allocations acres in the planning area.**

<b>Land Use Allocation</b>	<b>Approximate Acres in Planning Area (Percent)</b>
Riparian Reserves	574 (14%)
Matrix	3,548 (86%)

## Draft Timeline

The following draft timeline is proposed by the Forest Service to the Hood River Forest Collaborative (HRFC). This timeline is subject to change.

- August 10, 2023: Forest Service introduction of planning area to HRFC and field trip
- September – December, 2023: Forest Service meets at regularly scheduled HRFC meetings to discuss input and answer questions. Potential for additional field trip(s).
- December, 2023: HRFC develops input for proposed action and submits written recommendations to Forest Service.
- February, 2024: 30-day scoping period.
- Decision anticipated April, 2024.



