

**DECISION RECORD
FOR
Topsy/Pokegama/Hamaker Forest Health Treatments
Environmental Assessment No. OR014-98-01**

PROJECT: Matchbox Title II Pilot Project

BACKGROUND

Title II, Sec. 204(e)(3), of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000, commonly referred to the County Payment Program, requires a Merchantable Material Contracting Pilot Program in the event merchantable material projects are approved. Under Sec.204(e)(3)(A) Establishment, the **Matchbox Title II Project** has been recommended by the Bureau of Land Management – Resource Advisory Committees (RACs) and District Managers, and subsequently approved by the Oregon State Director. This project meets the established criteria for sale of merchantable materials using separate contracts for (i) harvesting or collection of merchantable material; and (ii) the sale of such material (i.e. pilot project).

This Decision Record will authorize work to begin on actions proposed and analyzed in the Topsy / Pokegama / Hamaker Forest Health Treatment Environmental Assessment (EA) No. OR014-98-01. This Decision Record addresses only the **Matchbox Title II Project** that is located in a portion of the EA analysis area. The **Matchbox Title II Project** is scheduled for implementation in June of 2004. There will be two phases to this project as described above. The first phase of the project will consist of a service contract designed to thin (cut, yard, and deck) an overstocked second growth mixed conifer stand to improve forest health conditions. The second phase of the project will be to advertise the decked trees under a timber sale contract.

DECISION

It is my decision to implement Alternative A, the Preferred Alternative, and the Project Design Features proposed in the Topsy / Pokegama / Hamaker Forest Health Treatment Environmental Assessment (EA) No. OR014-98-01. Specifically, this decision will result in:

- A service contract to implement a density management, forest health thinning on approximately 300 acres. The thinning will be done using ground based cutting and yarding equipment.
- A timber sale to sell the decked trees. Approximately 800 MBF of timber is anticipated.
- Following the thinning, depending upon the residual fuel loading, some areas may receive additional site preparation treatments using either mechanical slash abatement or prescribe burning or potentially a combination of both methods as described in the EA.
- Treatments as a result of this Decision will span over a 1-4 year period until the slash reduction treatments are completed.

Surveys

All required surveys have been completed.

Mitigations

- The Project Design Features / Best Management Practices described in Appendix A-1 of the EA shall be implemented
- Soils - Detrimental soil disturbance as a result of timber harvesting activities is an issue addressed in the EA. A number of mitigating measures are proposed in the EA to reduce the impacts to soils (page 32 of EA). For the **Matchbox Title II Project**, some site-specific factors that will help reduce soil impacts include:
 1. A seasonal operating restriction that requires the operations to be implemented during the summer months. Exception: An optional clause will be included to operate over a minimum

- of twenty (20) inches of snow.
2. Existing slash on the forest floor. Some of the area was precommercially thinned 10 to 15 years ago. As a result, there is a layer of old precommercial thinning slash that will help cushion the soil from disturbance.
 3. No submerchantable thinning (3'-7" material) is proposed as part of this timber sale

The EA also discusses using a rubber tired harvester/forwarder operation (Mitigation Measure 1). The advantage of using rubber tired equipment versus track mounted equipment is less soil is displaced when the rubber tired equipment has to pivot or turn. However, the disadvantage of using a rubber tired harvester/forwarder is this form of harvesting leaves the limb slash in the units and results in increased fuel loading. As a result, Mitigation Measure 1 will not be required because it does not meet the slash reduction objectives.

The KFRA is continuing to monitor soil impacts of on-going operations on an annual basis as required in the RMP. In addition, all operations are monitored to determine what combination of the mitigating measures described on page 32 of the EA could be used to best mitigate impacts under similar site-specific conditions.

RATIONALE

The decision to implement this proposal meets the purpose and needs identified in the EA and furthers the intent established in the Northwest Forest Plan and the Klamath Falls Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) to manage the Matrix lands with commercial forest products as a major objective. It also meets the objectives of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000 Section 2(b)(2)(C) "improvements in forest ecosystem health" and Section 204(e)(3) "Merchantable Material Contracting Pilot Program".

Alternative B, Harvest Only Salvage Volume, is rejected because it only addresses on-going mortality in the stand. It would not address or alter many of the existing overstocked forest conditions. These conditions would not be improved or mitigated and certain undesirable ecological trends would continue unchanged and, in some cases, would be exacerbated with the passage of time. High fire hazard conditions would continue and stand vigor and forest health would continue to decline. The successional trends that are contributing to a loss in the composition of pine would continue as well.

Alternative C, Fuels and Restoration Treatment Only, is rejected because it also does not meet the resource management objectives for the Matrix identified in the Klamath Falls RMP and the Northwest Forest Plan. Although Alternative C would reduce erosion problems and high fuel hazard conditions, certain beneficial economic opportunities would be foregone because no commercial timber harvest would be implemented.

Alternative D (no mechanized harvester allowed) was analyzed as an alternative to lower soil disturbance. In lieu of a mechanical harvester, all cutting would be done by hand and then winched to the skid trail with cables. Soil disturbance levels could likely be reduced. From an operational point of view, this Alternative would be very costly and potentially infeasible, particularly in some of the denser, smaller diameter stands. The KFRA continues to modify mechanical harvesting stipulations based upon post treatment monitoring. New stipulations in timber sale contracts include the mandatory requirement that the harvester be equipped with an arm capable of reaching twenty (20) feet. This reduces the amount of ground disturbance during a mechanical operation.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), informal consultation has started with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Bureau of Land Management has determined that the proposed action will result in a "may affect not likely to adversely affect" impact on the northern spotted owl and bald eagle. The proposed action will not proceed without a letter of concurrence (or Biological Opinion) from the US Fish and Wildlife Service which is expected by May 1, 2004.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was notified of this project in accordance with 36 CFR §805.5(b). That agency has raised no objections to the BLM's finding that it would not adversely impact sites of cultural or historic significance.

PUBLIC INVOLVMENT

The KFRA initially sent out a public scoping letter on December 18, 1997. Then on May 27, 1998, a public tour of the project area was held. On May 28, 1998, the KFRA announced the availability of the Topsy / Pokegama / Hamaker Forest Health Treatment Environmental Assessment (EA). A number of letters were received. The main categories of the comments include:

1. A thorough analysis of the impacts of the proposed action is necessary for the following resources; soils, water, fish, wildlife, old growth, critical habitat, Late Successional Reserves, Riparian Reserves, and watersheds.
2. Objection to commercial logging or road activity in roadless areas.
3. Assurance that all surveys are complete.
4. Cumulative impacts analysis that considers adjacent private lands.
5. Status of Marten, Fisher, and Wolverine sightings.
6. Timely NEPA documentation and dissemination of documents to the public
7. Impacts to the Klamath Wild and Scenic River. Maintain ecological, recreational, and visual benefits.
8. Utilization of an array of forest products prior to implementing prescribed fires.
9. Aggressive thinning treatments to improve forest health
10. Economic and community benefits from forest management activities (employment).

I have reviewed the public comments described above and have discussed them with the interdisciplinary team of specialists on my staff. The comments received do not provide any substantial new information or new analysis. Nor do they identify substantial new data gaps that would indicate additional analysis is needed. Finally, the comments do not identify any significant new data which would alter the effects described in the EA. The EA contains thorough analysis of the impacts to the various resources for which concern was expressed. Required surveys have been completed. The cumulative impact analysis does consider foreseeable actions on adjacent lands. The public has had ample opportunity to participate in the NEPA process. This project is designed in part to provide economic and community benefits, improve forest health, and utilize the merchantable material generated from the project to the extent practicable. I am confident that the EA represents a thorough analysis of the site-specific impacts to affected habitats and species, particularly in light of the more comprehensive analysis done in the Klamath Falls Resource Area RMP and Northwest Forest Plan to which the EA is tiered.

CONCLUSION

A. Plan Consistency

I conclude that this Decision Record is consistent with the; Klamath Falls Resource Area Resource Management Plan, the Record of Decision and Standard and Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl, and the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001).

There are no significant new circumstances or facts which were not addressed in the Topsy / Pokegama / Hamaker Forest Health Treatment Environmental Assessment (EA). Therefore, the Finding of No

Significant Impacts (FONSI) for this EA is still appropriate. This action incorporates the above Standards and Guidelines, the Best Management Practices (BMPs), and meets the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives.

This decision is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act. All required field surveys were completed according to protocol and the required Section 7 consultation with U. S. Fish and Wildlife is on going. It is also consistent with The Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations, and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

This decision will not have any adverse impacts to energy development, production, supply and/or distribution (per Executive Order 13212).

B. Summary

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulations (43 CFR 5003.2(1)), the decision for the **Matchbox Title II Project (Service Contract Portion Section 204(e)(3)(A)(i))** will not become effective, or be open to formal protest, until the first Notice of Decision appears in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located. This newspaper is the Klamath Falls Herald and News. Furthermore, the decision for the **Matchbox Title II Timber Sale (Section 204(e)(3)(A)(ii))** will not become effective, or be open to formal protest, until the first Notice of Sale appears in a newspaper of general circulation in the area where the lands affected by the decision are located. This newspaper is the Klamath Falls Herald and News.



Jon Raby, Manager
Klamath Falls Resource Area
Lakeview District, Bureau of Land Management

2/12/04

Date