



File Code: 1950/2430

Date: July 16, 1999

Dear Interested Party

The Hood River Ranger District, Mt. Hood National Forest, has identified you as an individual, agency, or organization which might be interested in commenting on our proposed action for the Clear Planning Area.

The Clear Planning area, situated within portions the Middle Fork and East Fork of Hood River Watersheds, is approximately 5,791 acres in size. It is located six miles southwest of Parkdale, near Laurance Lake. The land allocations for this planning area under the Mount Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) are C1-Timber Emphasis (3,195 acres), B2-Scenic Resource (1,256 acres), B6-Special Emphasis Watershed (1,054 acres), B3-Roaded Recreation (250 acres), and B10-Deer and Elk Winter Range (36 acres). A 1,281 acre roadless area, also identified in the Mt. Hood NF Forest Plan, exists. Under the Northwest Forest Plan's Record of Decision (1994) this planning area is identified as Matrix. There are approximately 1,598 acres of riparian reserves within the matrix.

Through field reconnaissance, data collection, and interdisciplinary team (IDT) meetings, a proposed action has been developed for this area. Forest Service policy and our current natural resource agenda is to restore and maintain healthy watersheds for use by current and future generations. Based on sound science, I believe this proposal meets our vision for restoring and maintaining these watersheds. The proposed action involves commercial timber sales and other projects. Tractor, cable, and helicopter logging systems are being recommended.

The proposed action involves commercially thinning approximately 343 acres of dense timber stands while maintaining species diversity within these stands. Trees would be thinned to an approximate 18 to 25 foot spacing, thus leaving 70 - 135 trees per acre after harvest.

The purpose of this thinning is to maintain and improve timber growth and yield of overstocked stands. Thinning is needed because both timber stand growth and health is beginning to decline due to overstocking (too many trees per acre for the growing conditions). This overstocking has resulted in increased competition for water, light, and soil nutrients thus lowering the resistance to insects, disease, and causing some tree mortality.

The proposed action also includes harvesting approximately 81 acres by regeneration harvest. A minimum of fifteen percent of the existing trees would be left after harvest. The slash debris would be piled/burned and a diverse mix of conifer seedlings would be planted after harvest.

The purpose of this regeneration harvest is to restore stands of trees in which accumulated growth loss is or will be exceeding the accumulated growth rate. This action (stand replacement)



is needed because some of the timber stands within the project area are in poor health, understocked, and unable to provide for forest products on a fully sustainable basis. These stands include three specific conditions:

- Lodgepole pine stands nearing the end of their biological life span (units 24, 26, 27).
- Understocked stands with laminated root rot (units 3, 14, 15, 17, and 20).
- Mistletoe infected stands (unit 19).

Of the estimated 81 acres, approximately 27 acres are planned in the scenic viewshed. This action is needed because several stands of trees, dominated by Douglas fir/grand fir, are infected by laminated root rot. Many of the larger trees are falling over from a combination of root rot and wind. The Visual Quality Objectives, as defined by the Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the Highway 35 Viewshed Management Guide, may not be met in the long term when the timber stands deteriorate due to disease and blowdown.

In addition, the proposed action involves harvesting a portion of the overstory trees and precommercially thinning the dense pockets of the understory trees after the partial overstory removal is completed on approximately 21 acres. A minimum of fifteen percent of the overstory would remain after harvest and the understory trees would be precommercially thinned to a twelve by twelve foot spacing after harvest.

The purpose of this treatment is to maintain and accelerate the growth of the existing conifer understory trees within the scenic viewshed allocated lands. This action is needed because previously entered timber stands currently contain an overstory that is partially shading the residual understory and inhibiting its full potential growth. In some cases, shade tolerant species (e.g. grand fir) are dominating sites that would otherwise be dominated by early seral desired species (e.g. Douglas fir/pines/larch). Portions of these stands also contain Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe, within the overstory, and has the potential of infecting the younger. These conditions could have a negative impact on maintaining the long term desired landscape character of the area.

Also proposed is commercially thinning approximately 14 acres within riparian reserves. In general, the outer portion of the riparian reserve would be commercially thinned to a eighteen to twenty-five foot tree spacing. A no cut boundary would be located at a topographic break within the riparian reserve and no thinning or ground equipment would be allowed between this topographic point and the stream.

The purpose of this thinning is to restore and enhance the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives on the outer edge of the riparian reserves by promoting the growth of large trees and expediting late seral forest conditions. Stand conditions within the inner portion of these riparian reserves are currently meeting the ACS objectives. This action, within units 1, 3, 4, and 11, is needed because they currently lack a sufficient amount of late seral forest characteristics, including snags, down woody debris, and large diameter trees that are needed to restore and/or maintain the ecological health of the aquatic ecosystems.

The proposed action also includes plans to construct approximately 5.5 miles of new trails and a trailhead to serve an estimated 8-10 vehicles near the Laurence Lake area.

The purpose of this action is to increase recreation opportunities, outside of designated Wilderness areas, by constructing a hiker/horse loop trail in association with the Kinnickinnick Campground.

The additional trail system is needed to help meet the demand for non-wilderness trails. Currently, there is a shortage of loop opportunities and trails open to horses on the Ranger District. The Hood River Ranger District Trail Management Plan has identified this proposed trail system to help meet the demand for equestrian trails, loop trail opportunities, and for opportunities associated with the Kinnickinnick campground, which was recently reconstructed and expanded in 1998. This trail system was also identified for construction in the 1996 East Fork and Middle Fork Hood River Watershed Analysis (Appendix D).

The proposed action includes plans to construct, reconstruct, and close roads within the planning area:

- Six temporary, new road systems, for a total of approximately 3.5 miles, will be constructed to facilitate the harvest of units 4 (portion), 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 18, 20, 26, 28, 29, and 31. The timber purchaser will close and scarify the road systems entering units 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 28, 29, and 31 after logging is completed. Other funding (KV) will close the remaining new road systems after post harvest activities have been completed.
- Temporarily, reopen approximately 1.7 miles of forest roads 3511620, 3511621, 3511630, 3511632, 3511015, and 2840622. These will also be closed after post harvest activities.
- Close, scarify, and seed or place rock and debris on approximately 2.25 miles of roads after post harvest activities are completed on roads 2840620 (at MP 0.90), 2840621, 3511012, and 3511631.
- Close the 2840660 road (.75 miles). This road is not needed for the long term management of the area and is causing some resource damage to a riparian area.
- Treat skid trails and landings by subsoiling, waterbarring, and replanting in all harvest units except commercial thinnings. Hand waterbar all skyline corridors.
- Place a portable bridge on the 2840650 road to cross Pinnacle Creek. The existing culvert/crossing is currently a fish barrier and will be removed by the Forest Service this summer, thus closing the road at the crossing. This temporary bridge will be removed after logging and post-sale activities.

The purpose of this action is to provide short term access to harvest the proposed units. Following logging and post timber sale operations, these road systems would be stabilized and closed. This action is needed because currently the existing road system in the area does not provide adequate access into some of the proposed harvest units. New roads, skid trails, and landings, left accessible after timber sale operations, increases the potential for future wildlife harassment, road maintenance expenses, and erosion/sediment transport potential due to continued vehicle use; thus are proposed to be closed.

The proposed action includes removing boulders during road reconstruction on previously obliterated Forest Service roads (3511620 and 3511621) and stockpile them at designated sites.

The purpose of this action is to stockpile a supply of boulders for future resource projects in this area of the Hood River Ranger District. This action is needed because there are no nearby quarry resources to provide boulders for future resource projects (e.g. riparian projects, campgrounds, and road closures).

Enclosed is a vicinity map, information sheet of the units proposed for harvest, and a proposed action map to show the location of the planning area relative to landmarks and roads. The proposed action map identifies the tentative timber stands proposed for the commercial timber sales and the temporary road system needed to access these proposed projects. It also identifies the updated Riparian Reserves with their true extent and locations.

Are there other projects you want the IDT to consider or concerns that you may have with this proposed action? For those individuals that wish to visit the planning area with the various members of the IDT, a Saturday field trip is scheduled for **August 14, 1999, at 9AM**, at the Hood River Ranger Station on Highway 35. Please let Rick Ragan or Bruce Holmson know ahead of time if you plan on attending. To assist us in meeting our time line for analysis and preparation of an environmental document for this planning area, we must receive your written comments by **September 1, 1999** at the address identified on this letterhead, or call either Rick or Bruce at 352-6002 extension 622 or 621, respectively, if you wish to discuss this proposed action.

Sincerely,



KIM M. TITUS
District Ranger

Enclosure (2) - Maps
(1) - Unit information sheet