



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

For the

Hole in the Road Timber Sale

January 2018

Environmental Assessment (EA) Number DOI-BLM-ORWA-S040-2014-0004-EA

Project Name in National NEPA Register: Hole in the Road Thinning Project

EA Name: Hole in the Road Timber Management Project

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Oregon State Office
Northwest Oregon District, Cascades Field Office

Willamette Meridian
T. 7 S., R. 3 E., Sections 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 26, and 27
Upper Molalla 5th Field Watershed
Clackamas County Oregon

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Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis for the Hole in the Road timber management project, which analyzed the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. This environmental analysis (EA) is documented in the Hole in the Road Environmental Assessment (EA#: DOI-BLM-ORWA-S040-2014-0004-EA). I presented an unsigned draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) with the EA and made it and the EA available for public review from November 28 through December 29, 2016 (EA Section 5.3). I've reviewed the comments BLM received and considered those comments in making this Finding.

The analysis in this EA is site-specific and supplements analyses found in the *Salem District Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement*, September 1994 (RMP/FEIS). The proposed timber management activities have been designed to conform to the *Salem District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan*, May 1995 (RMP) and related documents which direct and provide the legal framework for management of BLM lands within the Northwest Oregon District (EA Section 1.3).

Finding of No Significant Impact

The FONSI is defined in 40 CFR 1508.13 as a document briefly presenting the reasons why an action will not have a significant effect on the human environment which includes the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment.

If the agency “finds” that the action has “no significant impact”, the agency is not required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project. 40 CFR 1508.27 defines the factors to consider in determining whether a project is anticipated to “significantly” impact the human environment. The following FONSI documents the BLM’s evaluation of the potential impacts of the Hole in the Road Project.

Based upon review of the Hole in the Road EA and supporting documents, the proposed project is not a major federal action and would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects described in the EA meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, supplemental or additional information to the analysis in the RMP/FEIS in the form of an EIS is not needed. This finding is based on the following discussion:

Context [40 CFR 1508.27(a)] refers to the suitable scale for analysis. Potential effects resulting from the implementation of the proposed project have been analyzed within the context of the project area boundaries, the Upper Molalla 5th field Watershed, and the Pine Creek Molalla 6th field Watershed. The 231-acre project would affect less than 1 percent of the 43,084 acres in the Upper Molalla 5th field Watershed.

Intensity [40 CFR 1508.27(b)] refers to severity of impact. The following ten sections refer to the specific conditions/concerns addressed in §1508.27 and document the BLM’s consideration of the severity of the impacts as assessed in the Hole in the Road EA.

Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse [40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)]: The effects of commercial thinning are unlikely to have significant (beneficial and/or adverse) impacts (EA Chapter 3) for the following reasons:

Project Design (EA Section 2.3): The proposed treatments described in EA Section 2.3.1 (Proposed Action, including the project design features (PDF) described in Table 5) were developed by the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of BLM Resource Specialists so that the risk of effects to affected resources would conform to RMP Management Direction and be within the effects described in the RMP/FEIS.

Vegetation and Forest Stand Characteristics (EA Section 3.3.1): Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

A forest environment would be maintained in the project area by retaining green trees within project units (*EA Table 15*).

For thinning areas, there would be no identifiable adverse impacts to suitable habitat for Special Status species in the project units or any known or undiscovered Special Status species populations from this project because the nature of the thinning would not change these habitats in a way that would preclude those species. Potential undiscovered populations include seasonal fungi species.

The project would not contribute to the need to list any BLM Special Status species.

BLM examined past timber harvest areas near the proposed project areas and found no evidence to indicate that adverse impacts from invasive/non-native species would occur as a result of the proposed project. The PDFs listed in *EA Table 5* reduce potential adverse impacts by controlling the spread and introduction of invasive/non-native species.

Hydrology, Fisheries and Aquatic Habitat (EA Sections 3.3.2; 3.3.3): The project effects on water quality would comply with Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) standards. Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

Since stream protection zones (SPZ) will be maintained, there would be no direct alteration of the physical features of project area stream channels or wetlands from timber harvest operations, with the exception of one culvert replacement on the haul route.

The Proposed Action would have no affect to stream flow and potential increases in stream flow or to exceed the threshold for peak flow augmentation; therefore, the project is unlikely to cause indirect effects to stream channels as a result of flow alteration or timing.

The project would maintain current stream temperatures by retaining the current vegetation and shading in the primary shade zone (SPZ) and most of the current levels of shading provided by the secondary shade zone.

The Proposed Action would not result in a discernible effect to the levels of turbidity or water clarity in project watersheds or that turbidity levels would reach levels that would impact aquatic organisms or cause additional treatment expense or technical difficulties for the downstream water providers. Water quality would be maintained because logging, road construction/renovation, culvert replacement, road maintenance and timber haul PDFs (*EA Table 5*) and SPZ are expected to prevent sediment from reaching streams and causing sediment/turbidity that would exceed ODEQ water quality standards.

Water quality would also be maintained because road construction would occur on gentle, stable slopes, thereby minimizing the possibility of mass movement and/or sediment delivery through surface runoff to streams. Runoff from new roads would drain to vegetated slopes

where it would infiltrate into the soil rather than connect to stream channels to transport sediment or augment peak flows.

No changes in project area hydrology due to project actions are likely to be detectable, including mean annual water yield, fog drip, base flow and peak flows.

The project would not impact stream channels, aquatic habitat or fish populations because it would not cause water quality impacts that exceed ODEQ water quality standards and would not detectably change project area hydrology.

Soils (EA Section 3.3.4): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

The PDFs (*EA Table 5*) limit machinery operations so that there would be an overall maximum increase of 12 percent of the project area in moderate to heavy compaction/disturbance of soils from all sources, which is within RMP standards (C-2, 10 percent from ground-based logging; and C-9, 2 percent from site preparation) analyzed in the RMP/FEIS.

In the Proposed Action no loss of growth and yield would be expected at the stand level because thinning treatments typically lead to acceleration of average tree growth and compacted soils affect less than half of the rooting area of individual trees.

In the Proposed Action no measurable loss in timber stand productivity is expected over the next rotational (full cycle of stand establishment to regeneration harvest and establishment of the next stand, approximately one century) due to soil compaction and disturbance from logging operations.

Following completion of thinning, the majority of organic matter, understory vegetation and root systems would remain.

The project would not lead to any measurable increase in surface erosion and overall erosion would remain within the natural range of background erosion rates because of the PDFs for soil protection outlined in Table 5 of the EA would be adhered to during operations.

The project would maintain sufficient mycorrhizae populations because the root systems of most vegetation would remain undisturbed.

PDFs for the Hole in the Road project are in place to minimize impacts to soils (*EA Table 5*). With the use of PDF's, coupled with long rotations, no long term loss in soil productivity is expected.

Wildlife (EA Section 3.3.5): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

Proposed treatments (and non-treatment) would have trade-offs of effects in both the short and long term which would be beneficial to some species and detrimental to other species. The variation within the proposed treatment and maintaining untreated forest stands adjacent to all treated stands would provide a range of habitat conditions to balance the trade-offs of effects.

Existing snags and coarse woody debris (CWD) would be retained on site. Snags that need to be felled for safety would be left on site as CWD.

Proposed treatments would not significantly change species richness (a combination of species diversity and abundance) of the Migratory and Resident Bird community. No species

would be extirpated from the local area as a result of thinning. No take of species is anticipated from thinning harvest due to seasonal restrictions during nesting season.

See Intensity Point # 9 (*Below, 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (9)*) for effects to northern spotted owl.

Air Quality and Fire Hazard/Risk (EA Section 3.3.6): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

After 3 to 5 years the fine fuels generated by thinning harvest would be decayed in the units and the risk of surface fire would decrease to near current levels. Under the Proposed Action fuels treatment for site preparation would immediately reduce the risk of surface fire to equal or less than current levels.

The project would comply with State of Oregon Air Quality Standards by strict adherence to smoke management regulations.

Carbon Storage, Carbon Emissions and Climate Change (EA Section 3.3.7): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

The short-term carbon emissions and difference in long-term carbon storage that could be attributable to the Proposed Action are of such small magnitude that it is unlikely to be detectable at global, continental or regional scales. Additionally, changes in carbon stores are unlikely to affect the results of any models now being used to predict climate change.

Recreation, Visual Resources, and Rural Interface (EA Section 3.3.8): Effects to this resource would not have significant impacts because:

Recreation visitation would be effected while machinery utilizes roads during operations for short periods (weeks) in specific locations (units) during a 3 to 5 year period for safety, then should return to prior usage. Recreational access to the Molalla River would not be impacted by the project because the South Molalla road would remain open during timber harvest activities.

There are no authorized recreation trails to be impacted. No long term changes (more than weeks within a 3-5 year period) to public access would result from the project.

Changes to the landscape character would comply with Visual Resource Management (VRM) class II and III objectives. PDFs, time in view and unit locations mitigate any adverse effect to scenic resources according to VRM class II and III objectives (*EA Section 3.3.8*). Proposed timber harvest operations would not increase Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) access to units as most skid trails and all new roads would be blocked after operations are complete (*See Intensity Point # 7 (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (7)) below*).

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (2)] - The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety (EA Sections 1.7.1, 2.3, 2.3.1, 3.3.6, 3.3.8, 3.3.9, Table 5,): The project would not adversely affect public health or safety because:

Public access to hazardous work areas where there are accessible roads would be restricted by flaggers, warning signs and temporary traffic control barriers or devices.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandated health and safety regulations are applied to all project operations related to the project implementation.

All actions of the project must meet national and State of Oregon DEQ air and water quality standards, as provided for by the RMP/FEIS.

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (3)] - Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas: Effects to these resources would not have significant impacts because:

The project would not affect historical or cultural resources because there are no known cultural resources within project units or other locations where they could potentially be impacted by project operations. On site cultural and historic surveys have been completed and have not produced evidence to support the previous or present existence of artifacts of significant cultural or historical value (*EA Section 3.3.9*).

There are no park lands, or prime farmlands within the project units to be impacted.

The Proposed Action would not infringe upon the suitable Wild and Scenic River's free-flowing values, and maintain or enhance in the long term its outstanding remarking values; which include Geology, Recreation use and Scenic quality (*EA Section 3.3.8*).

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)] - The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial: The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing actions similar to the Proposed Action in similar areas so the effects are well known and not highly controversial.

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)] - The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: The effects of the project do not have any uncertain, unique or unknown risks because the BLM has implemented similar actions in similar areas where there were no unknown risks. No potential unique or unknown risks were identified by the BLM or by comments submitted in response to internal and external scoping. PDFs would minimize the risks associated with the project (*EA Sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.3.1, 2.3.2*). See Intensity Point # 4 (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)), above.

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (6)] - The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration: The project would not establish a precedent for future actions beyond the time frames analyzed nor would they represent a decision in principle about a further consideration for the following reasons:

The project is in the scope of proposed activities documented in the RMP/FEIS.

The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas without setting a precedent for future actions or representing a decision about a further consideration. See Intensity Point #s 4 (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)) and 5 (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)), above.

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (7)] - Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts: The IDT evaluated the project areas in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions and determined that there is a potential for cumulative effects on water quality and fisheries, peak flows and fisheries, visual impacts, and carbon storage and emissions. These effects are not expected to be significant for the following reasons:

Water Quality/Fisheries: The proposed project would be expected to temporarily increase stream sediment and turbidity as a result of culvert replacement, road maintenance, and road use (*EA Sections 3.3.2, 3.3.3*). These effects are not expected to be significant for the following reasons:

Any sediment increase resulting from thinning would be too small to be discernable relative to background sediment yields, would not be expected to exceed ODEQ water quality standards and would decrease quickly over time, returning to current levels within three to five years as vegetation increases (*Dissmeyer 2000*).

The limited magnitude of sediment inputs (non-detectable on 7th field watershed scale, not visible more than 800 meters downstream of crossings) and duration (primarily major storm events during the first year following disturbance at culvert replacement sites) of this effect would likely be insignificant for water quality on the watershed scale. Cumulatively, the Proposed Action would be unlikely to result in any detectable change for water quality on a 7th field watershed scale (even less effect on the larger 6th field watershed scale) and would be unlikely to have any effect on any designated beneficial uses, including fisheries (*EA Section 3.3.2.2, 3.3.3.2*).

Road use restrictions, road design and maintenance, protection measures and monitoring of road conditions would prevent increases in turbidity that exceed ODEQ standards which were established to maintain water quality (*EA Section 2.3.1., and Table 5*). When water quality is maintained within ODEQ standards, changes to sediment levels would not significantly impact fisheries, including listed fish habitat (LFH) (*EA Sections 3.3.2.2, 3.3.3.2*).

Peak Flows and Fisheries: The Proposed Action, combined with the effects of BLM's estimate of potential harvest on private lands over the next 10 years, would not augment peak flows to exceed the threshold for peak flow effects (*EA Sections 3.3.2.1, 3.3.2.2, 3.3.3.1, 3.3.3.2*).

The project carries no risk for contributing to any existing cumulative effect to watershed hydrology because the watersheds are currently at a low risk for impacts and there would not be any detectable direct or indirect effects to surface flows or ground water (*EA Sections 3.3.2.1, 3.3.2.2*).

The project is at low risk for potential increases in peak flows so it would not affect stream channels, large wood or sediment levels in project areas streams and therefore would not significantly affect fisheries (*EA Sections 3.3.2.2, 3.3.3.2*).

Carbon storage and carbon emissions (*EA Section 3.3.7*): The Proposed Action would not contribute cumulative effects to carbon storage and carbon emissions. The effects are not significant for the following reasons:

The short-term increase in carbon emissions and difference in long-term storage that could be attributable to the proposed project are of such small magnitude, as determined by analysis, that it is unlikely to be detectable at global, continental or regional scales or to affect the results of any models now being used to predict climate change.

Visual impacts (*EA Section 3.3.8*): The Proposed Action would retain the features of the surrounding landscape which is comprised of a patchwork pattern with harvested and intact

conifer stands of varying stand ages. The Proposed Action would not contribute to heightened sensitivity levels or cause the scenic quality of the overall landscape to change.

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (8)] - The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources: The project would not affect these resources because no districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places exist within or near the proposed project vicinity (*EA Section 3.3.9*).

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (9)] - The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973: The project is not expected to adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat for the following reasons:

ESA Wildlife - Northern spotted owl (*EA Section 3.3.5*): Effects to the species are not significant because:

The Proposed Action modifies but maintains 354 acres of dispersal and suitable habitat in the affected watersheds. Habitat conditions are expected to improve as treated stands grow (greater than 20 years); and retained trees would increase in size and be available for recruitment or creation of snags, culls and CWD for prey species and nesting opportunities, particularly in Riparian Reserves. Seasonal restrictions on project activities within a quarter mile of centers of activity would minimize disturbance during nesting season. The Proposed Action implements management direction provided in the RMP and is within the effects analyzed in the RMP/FEIS.

Thinning of dispersal and suitable habitat is a “not likely to adversely affect” action for spotted owls as described in the Biological Assessment (BA) (*EA Section 5.1.1*). Spotted owl suitable habitat will be maintained by keeping at least 60 percent canopy closure after thinning. Dispersal habitat will be maintained by keeping at least 40 percent canopy closure.

The Proposed Action is in compliance with the new Final Recovery Plan for the Northern Spotted Owl (*USFWS 2011*). The habitat is not located in LSR or critical habitat, and does not meet the criteria for Recovery Action 10 or Recovery Action 32. No Incidental Take of spotted owls is expected to occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

The proposed thinning connected actions described in this EA have incorporated the applicable General Standards that were described in the BA (*pp. 9-10*). This includes delaying proposed activities to avoid disrupting spotted owls at known spotted owl sites until after the critical nesting season, and monitoring/reporting on the implementation of this project to the USFWS.

The Proposed Action is not likely to affect spotted owl Critical Habitat, and not likely to diminish the effectiveness of the conservation program established under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) to protect the spotted owl and its habitat.

ESA Consultation is described in *EA Section 5.1*.

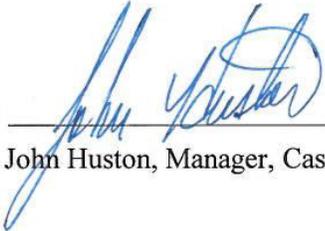
ESA Fish – Upper Willamette River (UWR) Chinook salmon, UWR steelhead trout (EA Section 3.3.3): Effects to ESA fish are not significant because thinning is not expected to affect these species for the reasons stated in the Hydrology section (EA Section 3.3.2).

Effects of road maintenance and log hauling are not significant because PDFs (EA Table 5) would prevent sediment from entering streams in quantities sufficient to exceed ODEQ water quality standards. The main haul route is designed and maintained to support year around use and direct most water and sediment onto stable slopes where it infiltrates rather than delivering it to streams. The haul route on road 7-3E-15.1 would only be used in the dry season when runoff would not be generated. Condition related restrictions and monitoring would prevent generating and delivering sediment to streams.

New road construction would be located in stable locations and would not contribute to degradation of aquatic habitat or extend the stream network through ditches on new roads draining into streams.

ESA Consultation is described in EA Section 5.1.

[40 CFR 1508.27(b) (10)] - Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed thinning harvest activities have been designed to follow Federal, State, and local laws (EA Section 1.7).

Approved by:  Date: 1/8/18
John Huston, Manager, Cascades Field Office Manager