

Draft Decision Notice and
Finding of No Significant Impact

ROCKY RESTORATION PROJECT

Mt. Hood National Forest
Barlow Ranger District
Wasco County, Oregon

This draft decision notice is made available with the Environmental Assessment for the Rocky Restoration Project pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(b). The Rocky Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (environmental assessment) contains an in-depth discussion of the setting, ecological processes, resource conditions, the purpose and need for action, the proposed action designed to achieve the purpose and need, project design criteria, alternatives considered, the effects and benefits of those alternatives and appendices, which include detailed unit descriptions and a discussion of comments received. This decision notice incorporates by reference the Rocky Restoration environmental assessment, as well as the resource specialist reports and/or analyses used to support the summary of effects discussed in the environmental assessment.

This project is located in T3S, R10E, sections 35-36; T3S, R11E, sections 35-36; T3S, R12E, section 31; T4S, R10E, sections 1-3, 10-15; T4S, R11E, sections 1-23, 26-27; and T4S, R12E, section 6, Willamette Meridian. All section number references are to sections of the environmental assessment unless specified otherwise. The environmental assessment can be found on the [forest's website](#). Acres and miles are approximate since they are derived from GIS. The Mt. Hood National Forest is referred to as 'the forest' in this document. The Mt. Hood National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) and standards and guidelines, as amended, are referred to as the forest plan in this document.

This draft decision notice documents my proposed decision and rationale for the selection of the proposed action alternative for the Rocky Restoration Project. The forest proposes a suite of activities including vegetation, fuels, and transportation management actions.

The following section describes the main objectives of this project in order to help with understanding the context of my decision.

Purpose and Need (section 1.4)

The overall purpose for the Rocky Restoration Project is to conduct restoration activities within the planning area to improve the health and vigor of forested stands, and improve conditions for wildlife and aquatic resources, while reducing the risk of fires spreading from public lands to non-federal lands and to provide a location for fire suppression personnel to actively engage a fire safely. In order to meet this overall purpose within the planning area, there is a need to:

- Restore stand health to improve resiliency to insects and disease;
- Enhance forest diversity within plantations;
- Enhance and restore pine/oak habitat and riparian reserves;
- Provide opportunities to safely engage an active fire near private land; and,
- Provide forest products consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies.

Draft Decision

I have reviewed the environmental assessment and the information contained in the project file. I have also reviewed and considered the public comments submitted on this project (see appendix C of the environmental assessment for response to comments). I have determined that there is adequate information to make a reasoned decision. **I have decided that I will select the proposed action alternative.** The proposed action is described in detail in Section 2.2 of the environmental assessment.

This draft decision would thin approximately 7,173 acres within the project area. All thinning activities would apply variable-density thinning to allow for flexible local density levels to achieve overall treatment objectives. The table below provides an overview of the acres for treatment.

Table 1. Summary of vegetation treatment type by acre

Vegetation Treatment Type	Measures
Aspen Enhancement and Meadow Restoration	35 acres
Plantation Thinning	5,398 acres
Oak Restoration Thinning	1,740 acres
TOTAL	7,173 acres

In order to facilitate the thinning activities, this project would utilize existing National Forest System roads, as well as approximately 26 miles of temporary roads, of which most of those miles (18.1 miles) would be located on existing, non-system road prisms. About 5.5 miles of the temporary roads would be located on old road alignments that have been converted to off-highway vehicle trails; and 2.2 miles would be located on decommissioned road alignments. About 0.3 miles of temporary roads would be newly constructed.

This draft decision would prescribe burn approximately 1,323 acres. Also, once thinning activities have been completed, various fuel treatments would be applied. The proposed fuel treatments include, but are not limited to, pile burning, underburning, jackpot burning, lop and scattering, hand and mechanical piling, masticating, or biomass collection. These are described in the environmental assessment in sections 2.2.3, 3.3.2, and 3.3.12.

Additionally, this draft decision, as described in the proposed action Alternative in the environmental assessment in section 2.2.2.3, would also close to the public approximately 38 miles of road. A list of these roads is provided in the environmental assessment, table 3. The roads would be closed to the public year-round by means of a gate or other suitable closure device. These roads would remain available for Forest Service administrative use, as well as for emergency use activities, such as search and rescue. The roads would receive minimal maintenance since no public traffic would be allowed; and the roads would be considered as maintenance level 2 with administrative use only.

Draft Decision Rationale

I believe that the proposed action addresses the purpose and need discussed in the environmental assessment in section 1.4.

Improve the health and vigor of forested stands – The thinning treatments associated with the proposed action would increase the health and vigor, as well as enhance diameter growth (section 3.2). The stands included in this project have been examined and those proposed for thinning have been found to be overstocked. When trees are too closely spaced, they experience a slowing of growth due to competition for sunlight, moisture and nutrients. Suppressed, slow-growing trees have begun to die and

have become susceptible to diseases and wind damage. The silvicultural activities associated with my draft decision would reduce both above-ground and below-ground competition by focusing thinning on smaller, overtopped, and/or less vigorously growing trees. As a result, the anticipated growth and developmental rate of the larger trees would increase in comparison to not taking action. I believe that thinning in plantations, aspen, and pine/oak stands is prudent to maintain health and growth and to achieve many important goals of the forest plan.

Diversity is the distribution and abundance of different native plant and animal communities and species. At the landscape scale, a mix of forest density and ages can provide habitat for a wide range of plants and animals. At the stand scale, other elements become more relevant, such as species composition, snag abundance or the number of canopy layers. While all stands are different based on their history and local conditions, many of the targeted stands now have minimal variability of vertical and horizontal stand structure (section 3.2). Additionally, stands are susceptible to the non-native species present in the project area.

The silvicultural prescriptions associated with my draft decision consider the need to modify stands to enhance diversity while achieving other important goals of the forest plan. Treatment would change horizontal and vertical structure, emphasize retention of minor species, and introduce more diversity. Snags would occur over time at levels sufficient to provide for snag-dependent species. Also, treatments would help create stands that are more resistant to disturbances, such as insects, disease, and fire. I believe the proposed action is appropriate to move these stands toward enhanced resiliency.

Improve conditions for wildlife and aquatic resources – In addition to the above noted improvements, vegetative and fuel treatments will benefit white-headed and Lewis's woodpeckers by opening the stand and reducing the amount of understory and shrubs on the forest floor. Areas of no treatment adjacent to treated stands will provide a mosaic of open habitat for nesting in close proximity to closed-canopy forests which provide foraging habitat for these species. Lewis's also will benefit from the recruitment of larger trees on the landscape. Wild turkeys will benefit from the opening up of ponderosa pine stands and the provision of suitable foraging nesting, brood-rearing, and roosting cover. There would neutral or both positive and negative effects on other wildlife species in the project area as a result of my decision (section 3.10.2).

Large woody debris levels are expected to increase over the long term along perennial fish bearing streams which will benefit those riparian areas. The instream restoration work located in the aspen clones will improve both fish and riparian dependent wildlife habitat (section 3.9.2.2.3).

Promote safe fire-suppression activities – Fuel treatments associated with the proposed action would remove sufficient fuels so that fires would burn with a lower intensity. This is of particular importance to me within the Pine Hollow wildland-urban interface, which our local communities have identified as an area of concern in the Wasco County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The project area is also directly adjacent to our neighbors, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The forest has had many discussions with our partners for years about the fire-hazard situation; therefore, I find it prudent to take action now on National Forest System lands in order to be good neighbors with our partners.

I am concerned about the safety of fire-suppression personnel. The treatments associated with the proposed action would reduce risks to fire-suppression personnel because flame lengths would be lower, thereby allowing firefighters safer options for direct-suppression activities (section 3.3). Due to

the current fuel accumulation, the ingrowth of saplings and brush, and the high density of stands, a high-intensity, large-scale stand-replacing fire in the project area would be difficult, expensive and dangerous to contain. Therefore, I feel it is prudent to take action now to minimize the risk to fire-suppression forces.

Management direction – The proposed action has been designed to meet the goals and objectives of the Mt. Hood Forest Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan and other amendments (s. 1.6). The proposed action would occur on the following forest plan land use allocations (LUAs): key site riparian area (A9), scenic viewshed (B2), pine/oak wildlife emphasis (B4), pileated woodpecker/pine marten habitat area (B5), and timber emphasis (C1); and the riparian reserves and matrix northwest forest plan LUAs. While each land allocation has different goals and objectives, I find that the various proposed activities, including variable-density thinning and fuels treatments, are appropriate tools to use to move the area toward desired conditions. Further discussion of consistency with standards and guidelines can be found in the sections that follow.

Public Involvement (section 1.6)

I first presented general information about this project to the Wasco County Forest Collaborative in the fall of 2014. It was then posted on the forest’s website beginning in October 2015. On October 30, 2015, a scoping letter providing information and seeking public comment was sent to the public. The legal notice for the 30-day comment period for this project was published in *The Oregonian* on September 26, 2018.

The proposed action was developed from comments and recommendations received from the Wasco County Collaborative Group and other members of the public. The Forest Service continued to provide information to the Wasco Collaborative Group at meetings and two field trips which occurred in May of 2015 and July of 2017. I received a wide range of comments and recommendations. Some of these comments are discussed in Section 1.7 of the environmental assessment; and more detailed responses to comments are included in appendix C of the environmental assessment. The following is a sample of some of the comments that I would like to highlight here and respond to personally.

- Public comments raised a concern about achieving a **minimum road system**. One commenter requested that all the roads included in the original scoping notice for the road decommissioning for habitat restoration (increment 3) project be assessed for potential decommissioning to reduce impacts to soil, water, and aquatic species from sedimentation; and to wildlife from road density. Scoping for the “increment 3” project initially occurred in 2010; and was re-scoped in 2014. Since then, this project has been cancelled. Information including the existing conditions from that project was considered in developing the Rocky Restoration Project, however, because no analysis was ever completed for the “increment 3” project, it is not part of this project. All but three of the roads the commenter requested to be considered for decommissioning are proposed for closure to public use in the proposed action. The three roads that are not proposed for closure to public use include the 4800-011, 4811-080, and 4820-120. These three roads were not included in the proposed action because they are not located within the Rocky project area. The interdisciplinary team reviewed the transportation system within the project area, and while decommissioning was considered, I have determined that closing roads would be preferable so that they could remain available for administrative use and emergency use activities.

The proposed action includes a description for how roads would be repaired, maintained or closed, including project design criteria that would be implemented to minimize the impacts of

roads on other resources. The transportation system as related to the proposed action was addressed in environmental assessment, section 3.5. The conclusion was that the proposed action along with other reasonably foreseeable actions would result in increased effectiveness and overall value of the Forest's transportation system while minimizing impacts to other resources. Project design criteria were developed to minimize the impacts of the use of roads for implementing the project on water quality and aquatic species and habitat. The effects analysis for these resources indicated minimal and negligible impacts (environmental assessment, sections 3.7 and 3.9).

The project administratively closes 38 miles of roads to the public, resulting in a decrease of open road density from 2.7 to 1.7 miles/square mile. This will be of benefit to wildlife species such as mule deer and elk, with less roads in their winter range resulting in less disturbance and avoidance behaviors. The minimum amount of temporary roads needed to achieve the vegetative actions will be constructed and all will be rehabilitated following implementation. Most of these will be on existing road prisms and alignments further reducing the potential for impacts on the environment.

- Some public comments raised a concern about **snag protection and creation**. Commenters requested that hazard trees be buffered instead of cut down and that the project include a specific plan to proactively create snags because the proposed action does not sufficiently meet Forest Plan standards. Buffering snags that are a hazard instead of cutting them isn't always possible because the Forest Service has a responsibility to provide for public and employee safety and has the discretion for choosing the most effective method to do so. All snags would be retained where safety permits, and if snags must be cut for safety reasons they would be left on site. Snags would not be cut if they aren't a hazard. The creation of snags is determined on a stand-by-stand basis after thinning has been completed. Requiring snags to be created would not be implementable across the project area due to the lack of available green trees that currently meet Forest Plan standards. The current proposed action would allow the Forest Service to create snags when the residual stand provides adequate sized trees and where residual density would allow for the creation without impacting necessary canopy cover and seed source for future regeneration and other resource protection needs. As stated in the wildlife section of the environmental assessment (s. 3.10), current snag conditions would remain unchanged under the proposed action, because while some may be more prone to falling after thinning activities the amount isn't measureable and an increased number of snags would be recruited as stands age.
- Public comments raised a concern about impacts of **thinning in riparian reserves** and that thinning activities should be removed because commercial timber extraction from riparian reserves is not scientifically justified. The majority of proposed action includes mechanized and non-mechanized treatments in the outer portion of the riparian reserves, but not within the primary shade zone. No-cut buffers range from 30 to 130 feet per side, depending upon stream type and fish presence (project record, Hydrology Report, pp. 11, 20-21). The exception to this is within the aspen enhancement activities which are proposed within no cut buffer areas. The prescriptions within riparian reserves either meets or exceeds the widths for the riparian management zone in the Forest Plan prescription. Also, treatments within riparian reserves are permitted when necessary to attain aquatic conservation strategy objectives (ACSOs). There is a lack of large, old forest structure within the riparian reserve network within the footprint of the Rocky burn. The dominant structure within the riparian reserve network is comprised of young, dense stands of a single-species. Treatments within the riparian reserve network are intended to hasten the

development of older forest structure outside of the primary shade zone along non-fish bearing intermittent and perennial streams, and outside of one site potential tree height (130 feet) on fish-bearing streams. Consistency with and effects on aquatic conservation strategy objectives is disclosed in the hydrology section of the environmental assessment (section 3.5).

I considered the comments received and I believe that the proposed action is both appropriate and consistent with relevant management direction and that the environmental assessment clearly explains the effects and benefits. I find that the science used to develop the project and to assess the effects is current and valid. I believe my draft decision balances the need for these actions against impacts to resources, and I have incorporated adequate project design criteria (section 2.2.3) to minimize impacts to resources and that those impacts have been thoroughly disclosed in the environmental assessment.

While I respect the opinions and wishes of commenters and appreciate the dialogue that has occurred, I do not consider any of the comments received to warrant the generation of any additional fully-developed alternatives in the environmental assessment. Comments also resulted in increased clarification and greater in depth of analysis in the environmental assessment.

Other Alternative Considered (section 2.2.1)

The no-action alternative (section 2.2.1) was not selected because it would not provide any of the benefits described in the purpose and need. If no action is taken, the majority of the stands would continue to be homogenous and overcrowded, thereby resulting in trees with reduced vigor and increased mortality (section 3.2.2). Densely vegetated riparian areas would be more susceptible to high severity fire due to excess fuel accumulations (section 3.7.2). If wildfires occur, due to overstocked conditions, fire intensities would be expected to be high and sediment delivery to project area streams would increase. Roads and roads converted to trails with impaired drainage would continue to contribute sediment to streams in the project area (section 3.7). The no-action alternative would not address the desired condition as stated in the forest plan, or the objectives of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Finding of No Significant Impact (40 CFR 1508.27)

Context

Based on the documentation in the environmental assessment and project file, I have determined the following with regard to the context of this project:

The environmental assessment implements direction set forth in the Forest Plan, as amended. The forest is comprised of about 1.1 million acres; the proposed action authorizes about 8,496 acres of vegetation management on the Barlow Ranger District, which equates to less than 1 percent of the forest. Given the area affected by the project, I find that the effects of the project are not significant as disclosed throughout chapter 3 of the environmental assessment and will have a negligible effect at the forest scale.

Intensity

Based on the site-specific environmental analysis documented in the environmental assessment and the comments received from the public, I have determined that this is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the design of the proposed action and the following intensity factors:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effect is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse. For this project, there are no known long-term adverse effects or cumulative effects to resources such as water quality, soils, riparian areas, fish, wildlife or heritage resources. These are documented in chapter 3 of the environmental assessment.
2. The project contains design features to protect public health and safety during project implementation including temporary closures necessary to provide for public safety (section 2.2.3).
3. There would be no significant effects on unique features in the area, such as historical or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. The project is not located in park lands or prime farmland. There are no wild and scenic rivers in the project area. Wet meadows, riparian areas, historic and cultural resources will be protected (sections 2.2.3, 3.7, 3.13). See also the description for protection of wetlands and floodplains under “Other Findings Required by Law or Regulation” below.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. While there is some opposition to forest management, I have concluded that the science behind thinning and other vegetation management techniques is not highly controversial based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information. I have also taken into account that opposition to vegetation management and fuels treatment has been fully considered through documentation of the no-action alternative.
5. The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain, nor do they involve unique or unknown risks. The effects analyses discussed in chapter 3 of the environmental assessment are based on sound scientific research and previous experience implementing thinning and fuel treatment projects across the forest.
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because this action is not unusual in and of itself, nor does it lead to any further actions that are unique.
7. Each of the resource sections in chapter 3 of the environmental assessment addressed potential cumulative effects. This action does not represent potential significant cumulative impacts when considered in combination with other past or reasonably foreseeable actions.
8. The action would have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and would not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (section 3.13).
9. My draft decision is consistent with the Endangered Species Act. The effects to federally listed species, including northern spotted owls, was included in a programmatic Biological Assessment (project record, WPPTL1 2016). A signed letter of concurrence was received on August 12, 2016 for this project for the finding of “not likely to adversely affect” northern spotted owls (project record, USFWS, 2016). The effects from the proposed harvesting activities, prescribed fire, pile burning, and underburning are **not likely to adversely affect** northern spotted owls and there would be no effect on Northern Spotted Owl Critical Habitat (project record, Wildlife Report, pp. 11-12). There would be no effect to Gray wolves because there are no known den or rendezvous

sites within 1 mile of proposed activities and no effect on the other listed species because of no habitat or presence within the project area (Wildlife Report, pp. 5, 20).

Since no Endangered Species Act-listed fish species or their critical habitat are found within the project area, the fisheries analysis concluded that this project would have **no effect** to aquatic species (section 3.9). It also found that the project would **not adversely affect** Chinook or Coho salmon essential fish habitat as defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act. As such, consultation was not required.

There would be no significant adverse effects to sensitive species or survey and manage species. Due to short-term (0-1 year) increases in fine sediment pulses into stream reaches, resulting from underburning and road maintenance activities, Interior Redband Trout (listed as a sensitive species) or its habitat may be minimally affected. However, the project would not jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species nor would it cause a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability to populations or species (section 3.9). The proposed action may directly impact individuals or habitat for sensitive plants and wildlife, but would not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability for the population or species (sections 3.6, 3.10).

10. My draft decision would not violate Federal, state, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. The action is consistent with the forest plan (section 1.5.1). The selected alternative is consistent with the National Forest Management Act regulations for vegetative management. There will be no regulated timber harvest on lands classified as unsuitable for timber production (36 CFR 219.14) and vegetation manipulation is in compliance with 36 CFR 219.27(b). The project complies with Executive Order 12898 regarding environmental justice. No disproportionately high adverse human or environmental effects on minorities and/or low-income populations were identified during the analysis or public scoping process.

Other Findings Required by Law or Regulation

Clean Air Act: My draft decision is consistent with the Clean Air Act. Burning would be scheduled in conjunction with the State of Oregon to comply with the Oregon Smoke Implementation Plan to minimize the adverse effects on air quality (section 3.4.1).

Clean Water Act: The Clean Water Act of 1948 (as amended in 1972 and 1987) establishes as federal policy the control of point and non-point pollution and assigns the States the primary responsibility for control of water pollution. Compliance with the Clean Water Act by National Forests in Oregon is achieved under State Law (project record, Hydrology Report, p. 27). Detrimental effects to water quality and quantity will be avoided, minimized, or mitigated through implementation of project design criteria and best management practices (BMP) prescribed for the proposed action. Project design criteria and best management practices are listed in chapter 2 of the environmental assessment. Based on the aggregate recovery percentage analysis, watershed impact areas would not increase further, hence increased peak flows are not expected from implementation of the proposed action. Sediment delivery effects to water quality are expected to be minimal in the short-term until vegetation is reestablished on the rehabilitated temporary roads (less than 2 years) and immeasurable in the long term (section 3.7).

Protection of Wetlands and Floodplains-Executive Order 11990: There are two units around wetlands where hand thinning would be conducted to enhance aspen growth. There would not be any

mechanical activity associated with the treatments, and project design criteria specifically for these two units would limit treating directly in the wetland. The small-scale floodplains associated with certain stream reaches of the small streams that flow through the project area would be buffered so that mechanical treatments would not occur on them. Three temporary crossings by roads and several other temporary road segments have been specifically identified as necessitating specific project design criteria to minimize their footprint and impact throughout the duration of activities being proposed. Those surfaces would be rehabilitated once they are no longer needed.

Endangered Species Act (ESA): Consultation has been completed for the northern spotted owl. Consultation was not required for listed fish or botanical species. Listed species are addressed in the environmental assessment in section 3.10.2.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act: The project would not adversely affect essential fish habitat since none is present in the project area (section 3.9.2).

National Forest Management Act: The proposed action was developed to be in full compliance with the National Forest Management Act via compliance with the forest plan, as amended. The project area has been found to be suitable for timber management (section 3.2). Temporary roads would be utilized in lieu of permanent road construction for implementation of the vegetation management actions, and would be rehabilitated when no longer needed for project implementation. Soil, slope, and other watershed conditions would not be irreversibly damaged; water bodies and wetlands would be protected from adverse effects; and the harvesting systems used are the best options to move the project area toward desired future conditions. Other requirements are discussed in the forest plan section below.

National Historic Preservation Act: The Forest operates under a programmatic agreement between the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for consultation on project determination. The project would not impact any significant heritage resources. Based on the proposed protective measures, the project meets the criteria in the Programmatic Agreement for “No Historic Properties Adversely Affected” determination (Stipulation III (B) 4) (section 3.13.2). Consultation with SHPO was completed for this project (project record, Heritage Resources, SHPO concurrence letter).

Consistency with Mt. Hood Forest Plan

I find that the selected alternative is consistent with direction found in the forest plan, as amended. It is consistent with standards and guidelines specific to the relevant land allocations and it is consistent with the applicable forestwide standards and guidelines (section 1.3). Consistency with forest plan standards and guidelines is documented in each of the resource specialist reports (project record, Specialist Reports).

- **Aquatic Conservation Strategy** – The project would contribute to maintaining or restoring aquatic conditions and is consistent with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives (section 3.7.2). I find that the project design criteria (section 2.2.3), such as stream protection buffers and operating restrictions on ground-based machinery, would minimize impacts and maintain the function of key watershed indicators that make up elements of the aquatic conservation strategy. These key indicators for water quality, habitat, flow, channel condition, and watershed condition would be maintained or enhanced (section 3.7.2).
- **Management Indicator Species** – I have considered the impacts to forest management indicator

species (MIS). Management indicator species for this portion of the forest include mule deer and elk, pileated woodpecker, American marten, wild turkey, and the western gray squirrel (section 3.10). I find that the selected alternative is consistent with the standards and guidelines pertaining to management indicator species, and that based on the limited effects to any management indicator species, the proposed action does not contribute towards a negative trend in viability on the forest (3.10.2.2).

- **Invasive Plants** – I find that the selected alternative is consistent with Pacific Northwest Invasive Plant Program Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants Record of Decision issued in 2005 and the site-specific invasive plant treatments for Mt. Hood National Forest Record of Decision issued in 2008 (section 3.6.2.2). Design criteria are included to minimize the spread and establishment of invasive plants (sections 2.2.3 and 3.6.2.2).
- **Survey and Manage** – I find that my draft decision complies with the 2001 Record of Decision and standards and guidelines for amendments to the survey and manage, protection buffer, and other mitigation measures standards and guidelines. Terrestrial survey and manage was not required because stands are under 80 years old and the proposed activities are not in habitat for listed species (project record, botany, fisheries, and wildlife specialist reports).

For aquatic species, surveys were conducted and one survey and manage species (Basalt juga) was recently documented in the project area. The general riparian project design criteria and best management practices will provide adequate protection of this species and habitat (project record, Fisheries Report, p. 9). For botanical species, the proposed action is consistent with the survey protocols 2001 Survey and Manage Record of Decision. All botany surveys included consideration of botanical species in table C-3 of the 2001 Survey and Manage Record of Decision (project record, Botany Report, p.11). No survey and manage species were found during field surveys, and no known sites were present in the project area. Habitats with potential for these species will be protected through other mitigations such as riparian buffers (section 3.6.2). There is no habitat within the project area for the seven wildlife species, so they were not discussed further (project record, Wildlife Report, p. 5).

Exceptions – The forest plan describes the process for documenting exceptions to “should” standards and guidelines (pp. 4-45). The forest plan does not require a forest plan amendment for project level exceptions to these standards and guidelines. The following documents the rationale for one exception.

I approve an exception for the **soil productivity** standard and guideline **FW-33**, as documented in the environmental assessment in sections 1.5.1 and 3.8.2. In the project area dry mixed-conifer types, sites would be less than 15 tons per acre. These dry mixed-conifer sites naturally produce less than 15 tons per acre, especially where a high fire frequency would be typical for the area. I approve this exception because it is necessary to achieve the project’s objectives for fuels management, and it is not expected to negatively impact the continued soil productivity because sites are expected to retain a sufficient amount of organic matter in the mineral top soil. The Forest would continue to manage soil resources with the goal of maintaining or enhancing its productivity. My draft decision also includes project design criteria and contractual specifications that aim at maintaining soil productivity (environmental assessment, section 2.2.3).

Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process

This project is subject to pre-decisional administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 218, subpart B. Also called the “objection process.” The rule can be found at the [USDA website](#).

Only individuals or entities that submitted timely, specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public participation (scoping or the 30-day public comment period) may object (36 CFR 218.5). Notices of objection must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 218.8. Objections must be filed with the objection reviewing officer within 45 days from the date of publication of notice of the opportunity to object in *The Oregonian*. The publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to file an objection to this draft decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Objections sent by U.S. Postal Service or other private carrier must be postmarked or date stamped before the close of the objection period and must be received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period.

Incorporation of documents by reference is not allowed, except for the following list of items that may be referenced by including date, page, and section of the cited document, along with a description of its content and applicability to the objection: 1) all or any part of a Federal law or regulation; 2) Forest Service directives and land management plans; 3) documents referenced by the Forest Service in the subject environmental assessment; or 4) comments previously provided to the Forest Service by the objector during public involvement opportunities for the proposed project where written comments were requested by the responsible official. All other documents must be included with the objection.

Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after the opportunities for comment. The burden is on the objector to demonstrate compliance with this requirement for objection issues.

Minimum requirements of an objection area described at 218.8(d). An objection must include a description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the objection reviewing officer to consider; and a statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment.

The objection reviewing officer is the forest supervisor. Objections may be submitted several ways.

- Postal Delivery: *Forest Supervisor, Objection Reviewing Officer, Mt. Hood National Forest, 16400 Champion Way, Sandy OR, 97055.*
- Emailed to: ***objections-pnw-mthood@fs.fed.us***. Please put ROCKY OBJECTION and the project name in the subject line. Electronic objections must be submitted as part of an actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf) only. Emails submitted to addresses other than the ones listed above or in formats other than those listed above or containing viruses will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the objector to confirm receipt of objections submitted by electronic mail. For electronically mailed objections, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of receipt, it is the sender’s responsibility to ensure timely receipt

by other means.

- Hand deliveries: *Mt. Hood National Forest Headquarters Office, 16400 Champion Way, Sandy, OR, 97055*. Hand deliveries can occur between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (closed 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday except legal holidays.

For further information regarding this project, contact Whitney Olsker at 541-467-5155 or by email at wolsker@fs.fed.us. For further information regarding objection procedures, contact Michelle Lombardo at 503-668-1796 or by email at mlombardo@fs.fed.us.

Kameron Sam

Date Published

District Ranger
Barlow Ranger District
Mt. Hood National Forest

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