



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Hood River Ranger
District,
Mt. Hood
National Forest

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File Code: 1920

Date: October 27, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

The Hood River Ranger District is conducting an analysis of plantation thinning opportunities. The Lake Branch Thinning project is located in the West Fork Hood River watershed in T.1 N., R.8 E.; and T.1 S., R.8 E.; Willamette Meridian.

The project involves the thinning of plantations that are between 30 and 60 years old.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this initiative is to thin second-growth plantations to achieve multiple objectives:

Riparian Reserves - This action is needed because these plantations occur in riparian reserves and because the current vegetation does not meet the needs of associated aquatic and riparian resources. The project would protect fish and water quality with design features such as no-cut buffers along streams. However, there are opportunities to thin the dry upland portions of riparian reserves to enhance riparian conditions. If no action is taken in these riparian reserves, stands would have reduced capability to produce the size and quantity of coarse woody debris sufficient to sustain physical complexity and stability of the riparian reserves and associated streams. Plantations can be enhanced by thinning to accelerate the development of mature and late-successional stand conditions.

Diversity - This action is needed because these plantations lack certain elements of diversity. They do not have the mix of tree species that were present in the original stand and they are relatively uniform in terms of tree size and spacing. There is a need for greater variability of vertical and horizontal stand structure. There is a need for more sunlight on the forest floor to create greater diversity of ground vegetation and to increase the quantity and palatability of forage plants. The project would include design features such as variable density thinning, skips and gaps. If no action is taken, over time the stands would become increasingly dense resulting in a long period of low structural diversity.

Health and Growth - This action is needed because these second-growth plantations are experiencing a slowing of growth due to overcrowding and some are experiencing suppression caused mortality. If no action is taken, this overstocked condition would result in stands with reduced vigor and increased mortality. There is a need for forest stands in the matrix that are healthy and vigorous with low levels of mortality.

Forest Products - One of the purposes of this project is to provide forest products consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies. This action is needed to supply forest products in a cost effective manner. There is a need to keep forests healthy and productive to sustainably provide forest products in the matrix in the future. Not only are forest products needed by society, but also the employment created is important to local and regional economies.



Road Management - One of the purposes of this project is to manage the road system to restore hydrologic function and reduce road maintenance costs. This action is needed because there is insufficient funding to maintain all of the Forest's road system. If no action is taken, roads that are not properly maintained would pose a risk of failure and may contribute sediment to streams. Based on site-specific assessments, roads may be repaired, closed after storm-proofing, or decommissioned.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service is to thin and harvest wood fiber from approximately 2,200 acres of plantations. The plantations occur in various land allocations including matrix and the dry upland portion of riparian reserves. Variable density thinning would enhance diversity. Riparian reserves would be thinned to accelerate the development of mature and late-successional stand conditions.

Roads would be repaired and reconstructed for resource protection and user safety. Road 1300 is a heavily used paved road that needs many deep patch repairs. Other roads also need repair.

This project will reuse some old temporary roads and build some new ones where appropriate. Temporary roads are roads that are built by timber operators to access landings and are closed upon completion of logging until they are needed again. They are not considered part of the Forest's system of permanent roads. The units proposed for thinning are plantations, many of which were accessed by temporary roads during the original clear cut logging. Existing temporary roads were assessed to determine whether they are needed for the current thinning proposal. These existing temporary roads are closed and in some cases have vegetation, brush and trees growing on them. Even though all of the proposed units were clear cut logged before, there are cases where it is not feasible or desirable to use the same roads, landings or logging method used before. To protect residual trees, soil and water, in some cases new temporary roads are proposed to access landings where the existing system roads and old temporary roads do not adequately access the ground. For this project approximately 1/2 mile of new temporary road would be constructed. After use, temporary roads would be bermed at the entrance, decompacted and roughened with the jaws of an excavator, and debris such as rootwads, slash, logs or boulders would be placed near the entrance and along the first portion of the road.

Approximately 22 miles of system roads in the project area were decommissioned and were taken off the Forest's data base of system roads. Varying treatments were used based on site-specific needs for each road. Each decommissioned road and the plantations they access were assessed to determine whether they could be considered for re-opening. The cost of helicopter logging was weighed against the cost of reconstruction as well as the resource benefits and impacts. Most decommissioned roads are not being proposed for re-opening. However, there are approximately 4 miles of decommissioned roads that can be temporarily opened with minimal resource impact. When decommissioned roads are reused they would be treated very similarly to the way existing temporary roads are treated. After use, they would be bermed at the entrance, decompacted and roughened with the jaws of an excavator, and debris such as rootwads, slash, logs or boulders would be placed near the entrance and along the first portion of the road.

This project also would close approximately 20 miles of system roads after stormproofing, and would decommission approximately 8 miles of system roads to reduce road maintenance costs and reduce impacts to aquatic resources. The closure and decommissioning techniques would vary based on site-specific needs. One emphasis for these roads would be complete blockage of the first portion of the

road to discourage unauthorized use. If there is the possibility that a large earth berm could be breached or bypassed, additional obstructions would be created on the first portion of the road using techniques such as roughening with the jaws of an excavator and placing debris such as rootwads, slash, logs or boulders.

Further details and Maps are available on the Mt. Hood Forest web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood/> in the Projects & Plans section.

Questions or comments may be directed to:

Mail: Jim Roden
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Estacada, OR 97023

Email: jroden@fs.fed.us

Phone: 503.630.8722

I am requesting your comments concerning this project. If you have any site-specific knowledge or concerns about the proposed actions, please bring them to our attention. The more specific you are, the better we will be able to address issues important to you in our environmental analysis process. Please submit your responses by November 28, 2008.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

/s/ Daina L. Bambe

Daina L. Bambe
District Ranger

Note: Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.