United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Waucoma

Huckleberry Enhancement

Fuels Report

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1.0 Introduction

This report is for the Fuels resource to inform the effects analysis for the Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement Project.

The risk of wildfire occurrence (FIRESTAT 2019) in the planning area is low, with less than one wildfire start per year over the past 33 years (1986 – 2018)[1]. Mt Hood National Forest fire records indicate the greatest risk for ignition is human caused activities (FIRESTAT 2019), with improperly tended campfires[2] being the primary ignition source. Other human activities such as fireworks, smoking, and equipment use, as well as lightning are sources of additional wildfire ignitions occurring throughout the planning area and the Hood River Ranger District.

The fire regime (Evers 2002), for the vast majority (95%) of the planning area, is characterized by an ecosystem that supports stand replacing fire, with a fire return interval between 100 – 400 years. These high intensity fires tend to be fanned by east wind events that occur late in very dry summers. An example of this type of wildfire is the Eagle Creek fire[3] that burned on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and to within ¼ mile of the Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement planning area.

The Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement project's purpose and need and proposed action is not related to fuels reduction to mitigate wildfire risk. This fuels analysis is brief and directly related to the existing condition, and effects of the proposed action as it relates to fuels resources.

2.0 – Analysis Framework

2.1 - Resource Indicators and Measures

The fuels report analyzed the proposed actions and the effects to the fire regime within the Waucoma Huckleberry Enhancement project area. An analysis of the fire regime can provide information on expected fire behavior and fireline intensities, key measures in evaluating fire effects from a wildland fire or prescribed fire.

[1] 25 wildfires in, and within ½ mile, of the planning area
[2] 4 wildfires ignited from abandoned campfires over the last 5 years in, and within ½ mile, of the planning area
[3] Eagle Creek Fire (OR-CGF-493). Started Sept 2, 2017. Rapid growth Sept 4-5 due to east wind event. https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/5584/

3.0 – Analysis of the Proposed Action

3.1 – Existing Condition

Forested stands within the planning area and continuity in the tree canopy support the potential for stand replacing wildland fires. Fire frequency and the fire return interval are in the acceptable range of normal.

The forest floor remains shaded out from overstory conifers due to fire suppression activities and natural succession processes. Under current conditions, the prescribed fire plan would require extensive development, a large organization of firefighting resources and substantial site preparation for the implementation of a prescribed fire. Restoration opportunities for huckleberry enhancement utilizing prescribed fire is complex and not economically viable.

3.2 –Environmental Consequences

3.2.1 - Direct and Indirect Effects

Under the proposed action, thinning and related activities will generate slash. Surface fuel loadings would increase immediately post treatment due to the activity generated slash. To mitigate the potential increase in fire behavior associated with these treatments, slash would be piled at landings or piled in units mechanically or by hand. Slash accumulations would be managed in accordance with forest standards for dead and downed woody material (USDA 1990). Slash would be treated and disposed of within two years of contract completion. Project design criteria have been identified to minimize the potential fire impacts from slash build up.

Burning of piled slash would have the potential to provide an ignition source for a wildfire, but control and management[4] of the burning would minimize the risk. Burning of piles would create smoke, but project design criteria would minimize smoke production and increase burn efficiency. Pile burning would follow the Oregon Department of Forestry smoke management rules (OAR 2019), which are designed to minimize smoke impacts to the public.

Under the proposed action, the tree canopy would be opened. The proposed actions would have an effect on tree canopy continuity in treated stands, but would not affect fire frequency or severity at the landscape level. The proposed actions would not result in a departure from the fire return interval in the planning area.

The proposed actions would create the potential for use of prescribed fire in future huckleberry enhancement projects in this area because the stands would be thinned or shelterwood treated, and the slash disposed of. Thinned and shelterwood treated stands would provide

[4] Prescribed burning would occur under a Prescribed Fire Management Plan, in accordance with Forest Service Manual direction; FSM 5142.6

conditions where low intensity prescribed fire could be considered for use to maintain openings in the tree canopy.

If the proposed actions were not implemented, natural successional process would continue. With treatment or no treatment, the landscape would remain in a fire regime comprised of high intensity wildland fires, with long fire return intervals between fire disturbances. With no action, smoke would likely occur with wildfire, but it would occur at unplanned times and with great intensity, compared to the planned and regulated timing and lower intensity smoke that would occur with the proposed action.

3.2.2 - Cumulative Effects

Because there are no direct or indirect effects to fire frequency or severity at the landscape scale, there would not be substantial cumulative effects related to fire frequency or severity.

Cumulative effects of prescribed fire smoke is administered by the Oregon Department of Forestry. Through registration and compliance with Oregon Department of Forestry smoke management rules, prescribed burning (pile burning) for this project, as well as any other burning occurring across the landscape, will be conducted in a manner to protect and maintain air quality.

3.4 – Summary of Effects

This project would have no measureable direct or indirect effects to fuels resources due to the project design criteria for slash and smoke management. Additionally there are no measurable effects from the proposed action that would impact the fire frequency or severity of a wildland fire at the landscape level. Harvest proposals were not designed with the intent to limit fire spread or reduce fireline intensities in the event of a wildland fire. The fire regime would remain in the acceptable range of normal.

5.0 - References Cited

Evers, Louisa. 2002. Fire Regimes of Oregon and Washington. USDA Forest Service Region 6. Unpublished draft on file at the Barlow Ranger District, Mt Hood National Forest. (Cited in text as (Evers 2002))

FIRESTAT Fire Occurrence data set. Reviewed February 2019. Retrieved from https://data.fs.usda.gov/geodata/edw/datasets.php. (Cited in text as (FIRESTAT 2019))

Oregon Administrative Rules. 2019. Department of Forestry, Smoke Management Rules. Chapter 629, Division 048. (Cited in text as (OAR 2019))

USDA Forest Service. 1990. Land and Resource Management Plan. Mt. Hood National Forest. (Cited in text as (USDA 1990))