

Summit
Consideration of Comments

Bark

Upon reviewing the project and visiting the planning area, we have serious concerns about this project. We are very concerned about the use of categorical exclusions (CEs) by the Clackamas River Ranger District and do not feel it is the best way to have an informed and participatory public process. CEs should be used for their original intended purpose of conducting “no brainer” activities such as repairing and replacing infrastructure – not for circumventing public input and avoiding environmental analysis.

Several comments were received for this project.

There are too many issues that need more careful evaluation with this project. First, one of the purposes of this initiative is to “reduce the risk of mortality from insects;” however, whether or not this result can be achieved by thinning is scientifically controversial. *There is much research that indicates that thinning will reduce the risk of mortality. The District also has experience with the Lemiti Timber Sale where this technique was successfully used. In addition to reducing risk of mortality, another objective is to enhance huckleberry production.* Second, the proposed units are federally designated Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl. Any habitat alteration of a federally listed species requires a complete environmental analysis to fully ensure no threats to the species’ future viability will ensue. *The project is not in Nesting/Roosting/Foraging habitat and it will only temporarily degrade dispersal habitat. Dispersal habitat is not in short supply in this area. A biological evaluation was completed for this project. The effects to spotted owls and their critical habitat was determined to be “Not Likely to Adversely Affect.” The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this finding.* Third, the project fails to value the recreational value of the land. *It is not likely that recreation patterns at Summit Lake would change.* Finally, the brief project notice does not furnish substantive and quantitative evidence showing this project will not cause serious and irreversible damage to soils, snags, downed woody debris, forest productivity, plant diversity, water quality, wildlife habitat and recreation. *The design criteria discuss protection for these resources.*

According to the Forest Service, “This action is needed because this natural second-growth stand is experiencing elevated risk due to overcrowding” (Summit scoping letter, page 1). However, the Summit stands that we observed are already relatively thin. Because of this and the significant controversy over methods to reduce mountain pine beetle infestation, the proposed thinning project would do little to meet two of the three stated goals of the project: to enhance growth intended to be abated by “overcrowding” and to reduce the risk of mortality from insects (Summit scoping letter, p. 1). The following photos *(available in the project file)* provide some illustration of already-existing gaps in the canopy, which allow a significant amount of light to reach the forest floor. Why does the Forest Service think that further thinning is necessary? *To achieve the desired results, lodgepole pine trees require a wider spacing than Douglas-fir at lower elevations. A silvicultural diagnosis confirms that trees will benefit from thinning.*

In addition to reducing risk of mortality, another objective is to enhance huckleberry production. Without clear information about how thinning would meet these two goals, it would seem the only goal the Forest Service could have the potential of meeting with this project is its third, “provid[ing] forest products consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan goal of maintaining the stability of local and regional economies now and in the future.” This final goal, however, fails to acknowledge the recreational value of this area due to its extreme proximity to the Summit Lake camping and recreational area. The ability of thinning mid to late seral stands *(the stands are mid seral)* to enhance growth and/or reduce risk of beetle infestation is highly controversial and not supported by scientific evidence. This, coupled with the fact that the forest has greater value as a recreational area than as a source of lumber, calls into question the attainability of all three of the Forest Service’s project goals. *It is not likely that recreation patterns at Summit Lake would change.* We urge the Forest Service to reevaluate the project’s goals and provide a complete environmental analysis before proceeding.

Categorical Exclusions

In limited circumstances, the NEPA regulations authorize agencies to use a “Categorical Exclusion” for a “category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and which have been found to have no such effect in procedures adopted by a Federal agency in implementation of these regulations.” 40 C.F.R. §§ 1508.4, 1500.4(p). Neither an EIS nor an EA is required for categorically excluded actions, but the NEPA regulations require Federal agencies to provide for “extraordinary circumstances” in which otherwise categorically excluded actions require an EA or EIS. 40 C.F.R. §§ 1507.3(b)(2)(ii) & 1508.4. The Forest Service provides that a proposed action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS only if: (i) the action is within a category listed in FSH at Sections 31.1b or 31.2 and (ii) there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in significant individual or cumulative environmental impacts. FSH 1909.15, 30.3(1)(b) (emphasis added). The Forest Service plans on categorically excluding the Summit Thinning Project from NEPA documentation under Category 12 of Section 31.2, described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, July 6, 2004. This category allows the Forest Service to exclude from NEPA documentation the “harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.” By definition, a project that is categorically excluded cannot individually or cumulatively have a significant impact on the environment. 40 C.F.R. §1508.4. Bark believes that significant impacts may result from the Summit Thinning Proposal; thus, a complete environmental analysis must be conducted. *FSH 1909.15 lists extraordinary circumstances that are considered to determine whether further analysis and documentation is warranted. I have considered these resources and the degree to which they may be adversely impacted by this proposal. The analysis shows they are being adequately protected and there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude the use of a CE for this proposal.*

Mountain Pine Beetles

As stated in the Purpose and Need document, “This action [thinning] is needed because this natural second-growth stand is experiencing elevated risk due to overcrowding. The stand contains primarily lodgepole pine with a component of Douglas-fir. Lodgepole

pine across the District is being killed by mountain pine beetle. Thinning reduces the potential for insect attack,” (Purpose and Need, page 1). Contrary to the Forest Service’s assertions, there is no scientific study demonstrating that thinning prevents or reduces the likelihood of beetle infestation. In fact, there is scientific evidence against this claim. Hughes and Drever (2001) found that with regard to pine beetle outbreaks in British Columbia, logging and sanitation harvest can increase future susceptibility. *Sanitation harvest is not proposed.* In addition, logging after a natural disturbance can further increase environmental disturbance outside the natural range of variability, making stands even more prone to beetle attack. Timber harvesting in the Summit project area, which has already endured a forest fire, is a recipe for increasing, not decreasing, the risk for beetle infestation. Beetle infestation must not be used as an excuse for logging without the supplementation of primary scientific literature supporting the hypothesis that thinning prevents or reduces the likelihood of beetle infestation. *There is much research that indicates that thinning will reduce the risk of mortality. The District also has experience with the Lemiti Timber Sale where this technique was successfully used. In addition to reducing risk of mortality, another objective is to enhance huckleberry production. Similar treatments on adjacent Warm Springs Reservation lands have proven successful in terms of reducing risk of mortality and enhancing huckleberry production.*

Additionally, Mountain pine beetles are part of a natural healthy process for forests. In the same study, the authors noted that bark beetles are native species, and natural and important agents of renewal and succession in forests. Amman (1977) also found that mountain pine beetle epidemics in lodgepole pine forests of the inland West are part of a natural “boom and bust” cycle that has occurred for centuries. Mountain pine beetle populations typically increase to epidemic levels when large homogenous areas of lodgepole pine mature and provide a sustainable food resource. The insect selectively kills susceptible trees from specific size classes, thereby facilitating development of a forest that is structurally, genetically and compositionally more diverse and less prone to beetle attack, thus starting the cycle over again. The best solution for the forest is to let Mountain pine beetle infestation naturally and healthily thin the stands. *Our experience farther south in the Olallie area is that the beetle kills almost all of the lodgepole pine trees. In addition to reducing risk of mortality, another objective is to enhance huckleberry production.*

In the Summit stands we observed, there was a great diversity among trees in the canopy and understory. Hemlock, western white pine and a variety of other conifer species have taken root in the sunlit openings of the forest floor that occur at a high frequency (seen in picture below). *(photo in analysis file)* Lodge pole pine is only one species among a diverse forest of Douglas fir, hemlock, pacific silver fir, western white pine and others. The low percentage of lodge pole pine that have suffered from beetle infestation will surely be replaced by a variety of other burgeoning conifer species in the understory. *The objective is to remove some trees that might be killed by insects and to leave a stand that has reduced risk of mortality. In addition to reducing risk of mortality, another objective is to enhance huckleberry production.*

Significant Impacts May Result

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) directs all federal agencies to assess the environmental impact of proposed actions that significantly affect the quality of the environment. 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C). NEPA requires the agencies to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) when proposing a major federal action that may significantly affect the quality of the environment. 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C), 40 C.F.R. § 1501.4(a)(1). If an action is not categorically excluded, an agency must prepare an environmental assessment (EA) to determine whether it needs to prepare an EIS. 40 C.F.R. § 1501. With respect to the Summit project area, a CE is inappropriate because there are several factors, including Critical Habitat for northern spotted owls, that indicate the project may have a significant effect on the environment. The agency implementing the project, not the public, has the burden of demonstrating that significant adverse effects will not result from the proposed project. *Id.* § 1508.13. To determine whether a proposed action may significantly affect the environment, agencies must consider both the context and the intensity of the action. 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27. The context of the action includes consideration of the affected region and locale. *Id.* § 1508.27(a). In analyzing “intensity,” the agency must consider such factors as the “unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to ... ecologically critical areas,” a high level of controversy surrounding environmental effects, “the degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species” or its critical habitat, and “whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.” *Id.* at §1508.27(b)(3), (b)(4), (b)(9), (b)(7). A CE is inappropriate for the Summit project because thinning could pose a serious risk to Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl. *The project is dispersal habitat not Nesting/Roosting/Foraging habitat (also referred to as Suitable habitat) and it will only temporarily downgrade dispersal habitat. Dispersal habitat is not in short supply in this area. A biological evaluation was completed for this project. The effects to spotted owls and their critical habitat was determined to be “Not Likely to Adversely Affect.” The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this finding.*

Northern Spotted Owls

CEs are not appropriate where extraordinary circumstances, such as adverse effects on threatened and endangered species or their critical habitat, exist. *Id.* at 30.3(1). The Summit Thinning Proposal would thin 70 acres of second-growth trees from an area designated as Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl. *See above.*

The Purpose and Need document states that the Forest Service has considered recently published new information about northern spotted owls, but it fails to state what information in particular has been considered. Given the potential impact of the project, more thorough and specific analysis is warranted. New information on the threatened northern spotted owl indicates that there are significant new uncertainties for the owl that have not been fully considered at the regional or local scale. As recognized by the spotted owl status review, all existing suitable habitat could be critical to the survival of the spotted owl. *The project is not in Suitable habitat.* New concerns include but are not limited to the following:

- competition and displacement from the barred owl that is dramatically increasing in numbers within the range of the spotted owl;
- the effects of West Nile Virus which is fatal to the owl;
- the potential loss of habitat from Sudden Oak Death syndrome;
- greater than expected loss of habitat to wildfire;
- the potential effect of climate change on regional vegetation patterns; and
- misapplication of the Healthy Forest Initiative.

The above factors were considered and would not result in a modification of the proposed action.

Per above, the 2004 status review identified “Inappropriate Application of ‘Healthy Forest Initiative’” to be a newly inadequate regulatory mechanism.

<http://www.sei.org/owl/meetings/Presentations/June/Gutierrez-Threats.pdf> Thinning in fire suppressed eastside owl habitat can be beneficial if it reduces surface and ladder fuels to reduce the risk of canopy replacing fire, while at the same time retaining enough forest canopy and structure to still provide habitat. Inappropriate use of the HFI would include an overzealous thinning regime that removed too much canopy so as to eliminate the owl habitat value and/or increase fire hazard by moving fuels from the canopy to the ground where they are more available to combust, by causing fuels to dry out and wind speeds to increase, and/or by stimulating the growth of ladder fuels. *The Summit project is not part of the Healthy Forest Initiative.*

Bark members recently visited the Summit Thinning Proposal site and found that the forest canopy is already relatively thin and allows a good deal of sunlight to reach the forest floor, as indicated by the following photo. *(photo in analysis file). To achieve the desired results, lodgepole pine trees require a wider spacing than Douglas-fir at lower elevations. A silvicultural diagnosis confirms that trees will benefit from thinning.*

Further thinning would likely remove too much of an already minimal canopy causing both degradation of owl habitat and increased fire hazard by drying out the under story and moving fuels from the canopy to the ground where they are more available to support the spread of a ground fire. Slash will be treated to avoid a fire hazard situation. *With no action, there would likely be serious mortality that would result in a stand with greater fire risk than a thinned and healthier stand.*

The Forest Service provides justification for the temporary degradation of NSO dispersal habitat with the qualification that “long term benefits will outweigh short term effects” (Scoping letter, page 2). According to the 2004 status review, this may be an inaccurate justification. Because competition and displacement with the barred owl is “dramatically increasing,” any degradation of dispersal habitat can further increase competition over thinned resources, leading to the possible spotted owl displacement. If this scenario unfolds, the spotted owl will not only reap no long term benefits, but also lose valuable dispersal habitat. This possibility is unacceptable and needs to be examined in a complete environmental assessment. *An unthinned stand would likely have serious mortality that would result in a stand with poorer dispersal characteristics than a thinned and healthier stand.*

The Oak Grove Watershed Analysis (OGWA) asserts that “for management purposes, the highest risk to these species [NSO, pine marten, fisher, pileated woodpecker, northern goshawk, barred owl, and possibly wolverine] would occur by fragmenting or removing habitat within the blocks assigned values of 1, 2, 3, or 4” (OGWA, page 51). According to Map 4-4, the project area is comprised of a value 4 block, “Not Suit, Contributing.” *It appears you may not have located Summit correctly on the map. The project is not within block 4, it is in the white area of the map meaning that it has no value for late-seral species with large home ranges.* Thinning would further fragment this habitat and, according to the OGWA, pose “the highest risk” to the NSO. Instead, management activities should be directed toward cultivating key late seral habitat components in mid seral stands, such as down logs, large snags, large remnant trees in patches supporting wind-dispersed lichens (51). These are the qualities toward which the project should be striving – thinning already relatively thin stands is not necessary and will only degrade snag and down log densities. *The above is not applicable to the white areas on the map.* Additionally, the Summit project area comprises last remaining “interior forest” conditions with no edge effects (OGWA, Map 4-5). This is of paramount importance to many species, especially the NSO. The OGWA acknowledges this, recommending to “increase amount of interior forest habitat” (OGWA, page 54). The alteration of this last “interior forest” area and its effect on NSO populations must be fully analyzed in an environmental assessment. *It appears you may not have located Summit correctly on the map. The Summit project is not within the interior forest area shown on Map 4-5.*

Cumulative Impacts

The regulations implementing NEPA state that cumulative effects result “from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future [federal and non-federal] actions.” 40 C.F.R. § 1508.7. “Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.” *Id.* § 1508.27(b)(7). The Summit Thinning Purpose and Need document fails to address the possibility of cumulative impacts caused by the thinning proposal, with respect to critical habitat on the watersheds, soils, vegetation and wildlife in concert with recent past logging projects in the area. Please fully disclose the cumulative watershed effects analysis for this proposed project, including all past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions or both public and private land impacting this watershed. Please document the current watershed condition, Threshold of Concerns (TOC) and specific soil conditions related to the sensitivity index for this watershed. *FSH 1909.15 lists extraordinary circumstances that are considered to determine whether further analysis and documentation is warranted. I have considered these resources and the degree to which they may be adversely impacted by this proposal. The analysis shows they are being adequately protected and there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude the use of a CE for this proposal.*

Recreational Value

The Summit CE scoping letter insists that this project is consistent with Forest Plan – Forest Management Goal #19, “maintaining the stability of local and regional

economies” (Summit scoping letter, page 6). The forest service incorrectly assumes that the maintenance of local and regional economies can only be achieved through production. Contrary to the scoping letter, the OGWA asserts that the best way to help local and regional economies in the Oak Grove Watershed, of which Summit CE is a part, is through recreation. According to the OGWA, “The Oak Grove watershed is one of the most important watersheds for recreation use in the Mt. Hood National Forest and attracts an estimated one half million visitors yearly. Not just for Timothy Lake, but also back country lakes, historic geologic and interpretive features, meadows, deer and elk herds, sport fisheries, scenic drives, an extensive trail network, and groomed snow mobile trails” (OGWA, page 5). The Summit project is less than a mile down the road from the fully developed recreation area and campsite comprising Summit Lake. The OGWA indicates that “according to the SCORP results, all recreation uses currently in the watershed are projected to increase in demand... Other uses which can be transferred, such as camping at a back country lake [i.e., campground next to lake adjacent to Summit project], could mean a relocation of use to an undeveloped site or overcrowding” (30) Timothy lake recreationists are projected to increase and displace into other areas of the watershed – Summit being a prime example. In light of this information, OGWA recommends to “expand developed recreation facilities around Timothy Lake” (31). The proposed project is less than a mile from the Summit Lake recreation area on Road 32. It lies between the recreation area and the main road, Highway 42. During logging activities, will the road be closed and access to the lake blocked? If the Forest Service wishes to abide by Forest Management Goal #19, they would do so best by encouraging recreation in Summit Lake, not discouraging it through a highly disruptive logging project. *The road would be kept open during logging. The project would not likely reduce recreation use of the area. Recreational huckleberry picking would likely increase.*

Survey and Manage/Aquatic Conservation Strategy Requirements

The Forest Service has failed to prove that this project is consistent with the 2001 FSEIS to Amend the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standard and Guidelines and/or the 2004 FSEIS to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guideline. With respect to Survey and Manage requirements, the Forest Service must conduct surveys consistent with the 2001 FSEIS Guidelines. There is no information in the Summit Thinning documents indicating whether the surveys were completed and what the survey results were. Thus, the Forest Service has not demonstrated that it has met its requirements under the Northwest Forest Plan.

With respect to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy, the Forest Service stated that the project is not in riparian reserves so it is therefore consistent with the Forest Plan as amended by the 2004 Record of Decision to Clarify Provisions Relating to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (Summit proposal, p. 3). It should be noted whether any of the requirements of the 2001 Record of Decision have been met. *An assessment of effects to sensitive species has been completed. Details are included in the biological evaluations. Survey and manage standards and guidelines are no longer applicable. The Decision Memo contains documentation of consistency with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.*

Conclusion

A Categorical Exclusion is inappropriate for the Summit Thinning project for numerous reasons. First, logging in the Summit project area for the alleged Purpose and Need is not supported by science. Scientific studies, in fact, show that logging can increase susceptibility to Mountain pine beetles. The mountain pine beetle is a native species that plays an important ecological role in improving a forest's structural and compositional diversity. The Summit area should be left alone so that, should infestation occur, the stands can be thinned naturally. Second, the project area is Critical Habitat for the northern spotted owl, such that further analysis needs to be done regarding the effects of thinning on owl habitat and competition with the barred owl. Third, and perhaps most important, the Forest Service has failed to consider the already-existing average density of the stand and failed to clearly articulate how further thinning will benefit the project area. Finally, the Forest Service failed to consider the potentially highly disruptive impact of the project on recreation in the Summit Lake Area, which is located within one of the most important watersheds for recreation. The Forest Service must complete a thorough environmental analysis of the Summit Thinning project with a newly developed, scientifically and economically sound proposal that will actually meet established goals. *See above.*

Works Cited:

Amman, G.D. 1977. The role of the mountain pine beetle in lodgepole pine ecosystems: Impact of succession. In W.J. Mattson, ed. *The Role of Arthropods in Forest Ecosystems*. Springer Verlag. New York, N.Y. Pp. 3-18.

Hughes, J. and R. Drever. 2001. *Salvaging solutions: science-based management of British Columbia's pine beetle outbreak*. Report commissioned by The David Suzuki Foundation, Vancouver, B.C.

ONRC

- Thank you for not proposing new roads for this project.
- While I understand your concern about preventing a large-scale outbreak of beetle mortality, you should also be considering the natural role of beetles in these stands. Beetle attacks can actually help keep forests healthy by thinning trees stressed by overcrowding and restoring forest health in the long-term. See the science found in a 2001 report from OSU scientists (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2001/10/011030230203.htm>). *This article also suggests the following, "address the fundamental issue of overcrowding through forest thinning." The purpose and need does not suggest that we are attempting to prevent large-scale outbreak of beetle mortality. The objective is to reduce the risk of mortality of the trees inside the 70-acre unit. There are many areas on the Forest where it is appropriate to follow your suggested strategy of allowing beetles to naturally kill trees. However the Summit project is in the CI Timber Emphasis land allocation where it is appropriate to thin to enhance forest health. In*

addition to reducing risk of mortality, another objective is to enhance huckleberry production.

- While we appreciate your accommodation of the Warm Springs Tribes' request to consider enhancing huckleberry habitat and using a stewardship contract, we have a couple of concerns:
 - First, we're supportive of the idea of adjusting your prescriptions to help huckleberries as long as the good variable density/diversity principles are still applied.
 - Second, we do not believe this project qualifies as a stewardship project. The proposal is to log in a 70 year old natural stand in critical habitat for the northern spotted owl. The project development was not done using a collaborative process. The Clackamas Collaborative Group is in the beginning stages of setting criteria and priorities for stewardship projects. Let's not abandon that process here. It's great that the Tribes might be interested in bidding on a stewardship contract, but there will be others that come out of a legitimate collaborative process that they can be involved in. *We would be considering the recommendations of the Clackamas River Stewardship Partners before using a stewardship contract.*
 - Finally, if you are considering this request for changes from the Tribes, perhaps this project would be better analyzed with an EA, where you can fully develop an alternative to your proposed action and the potential differences in environmental impacts. *The suggestions from Warm Springs would only be a minor adjustment to the original concept and is still within the range of trees per acre and fits the concept of variable density thinning.*

Thinning for stand diversity is best accomplished when stands are less than 50 years old, so we are somewhat disappointed that you are planning the Summit project in a 70 year old natural stand when many plantations of commercial age are available. *We intend to thin plantations when they are old enough and viable for commercial thinning. No plantation thinning opportunities would be deferred because of this proposal.*

Corkran

The modification of the prescription to take more trees and try to grow more huckleberries would seem to be a decision to keep the plant succession at an earlier stage. Would regeneration then be suppressed to continue huckleberry production? Are the tribes doing this on their old burns at similar elevations? If this is matrix land, is this an appropriate use? Or should these lands be removed from the matrix as unsuited for timber production, periodically thinned or burned or both in order to maintain a high elevation component of the ecosystem which otherwise would disappear with fire suppression and management for timber production? *The thinning prescription would be modified slightly to enhance huckleberries and the stand would continue to be considered mid seral, not early seral.*

This strategy is compatible with timber management and there is no proposal to change the land allocation or consider the land unsuitable for timber production.

Jacobson

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Summit Thinning Project. I am disappointed and discouraged that the Forest Service chose to use the inappropriate Categorical Exclusion (CE) environmental analysis instead of a more rigorous analysis like an EIS.

In limited circumstances, the NEPA regulations authorize agencies to use a "Categorical Exclusion" for a "category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and which have been found to have no such effect in procedures adopted by a Federal agency in implementation of these regulations." 40 C.F.R. §§ 1508.4, 1500.4(p). Neither an EIS nor an EA is required for categorically excluded actions, but the NEPA regulations require Federal agencies to provide for "extraordinary circumstances" in which otherwise categorically excluded actions require an EA or EIS. 40 C.F.R. §§ 1507.3(b)(2)(ii) & 1508.4. The Forest Service provides that a proposed action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS only if: (i) the action is within a category listed in FSH at Sections 31.1b or 31.2 and (ii) there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in significant individual or cumulative environmental impacts. FSH 1909.15, 30.3(1)(b) (emphasis added).

The Forest Service plans on categorically excluding the Summit Thinning Project from NEPA documentation under Category 12 of Section 31.2, described in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, July 6, 2004. This category allows the Forest Service to exclude from NEPA documentation the "harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction." By definition, a project that is categorically excluded cannot individually or cumulatively have a significant impact on the environment. 40 C.F.R. §1508.4. Significant impacts may result from the Summit Thinning Proposal; thus, a complete environmental analysis must be conducted.

In addition, an investigation of the site of the proposed action shows that the need for thinning is not understandable. Canopy cover is open and not crowded. The necessity of thinning to prevent insect damage has no scientific basis. Insect damage and disease damage are endemic in native forests. They provide habitat for species that require dead and dying trees as snags and downed woody material.

Another problem with this project is the fact that it is near heavily used recreation areas. Recreation provides more revenue than timber production.

The Forest Service should reconsider this project. Our tax dollars should be used in the most effect manner. I don't believe that this project is a good use of federal funds.

See response to similar BARK comments above.

Joos

I think all the suggestions by the Confederated Tribes are very reasonable and desirable.

Pemberton

I'd love to send you a comment about the Summit Thinning, but I've never been there and have no idea of the lay of the land. Your description of the project sounds very reasonable, but I have no clear thoughts on the situation.

Turo/Warm Springs Tribes

The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO) support activities that improve forest health, watershed function, reduce fuel loads, and improve and create opportunities for tribal members to exercise their treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather cultural plants within the ceded lands. Due to the close proximity of this project to the reservation it provides an excellent opportunity to protect and enhance these resources in an area that is easily accessible and available to tribal members.

This has been incorporated into the project design.

Projects to improve forest health, provide marketable timber, and enhance huckleberry patches have been conducted on the reservation during the winter with over the snow logging techniques. Tractor logging over a snow pack of three feet or greater was prescribed to reduce impacts to and protect the existing huckleberry resource. *A field discussion has clarified that two feet of snow will adequately protect plants.*

The Tribal Natural Resources Branch is currently developing the First Foods initiative with the intent to provide known areas for CTWSRO to exercise their Treaty Rights, which include the opportunity to harvest fish, wildlife, and traditional native plant resources of federal land within the ceded boundaries expressed in the Treaty of 1855. The tribes support and pursue projects that will provide opportunities to protect, maintain, and enhance these resources across the ceded lands. This initiative can be used as a tool to pursue stewardship contracts and other collaborative opportunities to achieve conditions on the ground that meet the goals and objectives of all stakeholders.