

DECISION MEMO

Tucker Salvage and Miscellaneous Timber Stand Improvement Projects
USDA Forest Service, Region 9, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
Eagle River-Florence Ranger District
Forest, Florence, Oneida, and Vilas Counties, Wisconsin

Description of Decision

My decision is to allow salvage harvesting in 241 acres of white spruce and jack pine stands, and timber stand improvement activities in 26 acres of northern hardwood and red pine stands (see attached vicinity map and stand lists).

Salvage Harvest

Approximately 204 acres of white spruce (13 stands) and 37 acres (2 stands) of jack pine will be salvage harvested. This is 5 acres more than the initial proposal. Stand 3145-17 was identified as a salvage candidate after the scoping package was sent out on December 14th, 2007. Since no comments were received opposing the project, I believe it is in the best interest of forest health to include it now.

The harvest/regeneration prescription for each stand depends on the tree species currently growing in each stand and the long-term desired future condition. Some clearing of non-commercial vegetation will be necessary to utilize old landing sites, but no road construction is required to access these stands. Any currently closed roads used for access will be closed after project activities are completed.

These stands proposed for salvage treatment are only a small portion of the spruce forest that is currently damaged or dying. Many stands were considered too far gone or not economically suitable for harvest. These unharvested stands will provide potential habitat for the black-backed woodpecker.

Miscellaneous Timber Stand Improvements

Release by hand-cutting will occur in two stands. In the 16-acre northern hardwood stand sugar maple saplings will be cut down with hand tools in order to release red oak saplings. In a ten-acre red pine plantation most of the competing jack pine will be removed; however, some jack pine seedlings will be left for diversity in areas where the red pine is sparse.

Purpose of Decision

Salvage Harvest

Most of the Forest's spruce stands were planted from the 1930s through the 1950s in locations better suited for other species. Over the past few years spruce decline has killed thousands of acres of white spruce across four of the five ranger districts on the CNNF Forest. Trees in the white spruce stands proposed for salvage harvest are dead or dying as a result of drought stress, spruce budworm, needle cast fungi, or marginal site conditions. These stands were not included in the 2004 Spruce Decline Project Environmental Assessment or the 2006 Spruce Decline II Project Environmental Assessment because at that time they did not exhibit signs of decline. Since then most of the trees in the spruce stands under this proposal have succumbed as well.

Jack pine budworm, the most significant pest of jack pine, is a needle-feeding caterpillar native to North America. Jack pine defoliation has been occurring for several years on Vilas County lands to the west of the Forest; it has now moved to National Forest System lands in the northwestern portion of the Forest. Older stands of jack pine on sandy sites are under stress from drought and are very vulnerable to mortality and top-kill.

Mortality estimates range from 10 to 60 percent and average about 25 percent. Most trees in these stands have only about 20 percent live crown left. The majority of the trees do not have enough live needles left to survive, and it is anticipated that more trees will be affected before this project is implemented.

In order to reduce the fire hazard associated with the dead and dying trees, and to minimize the likelihood of another insect outbreak in the future, most stands salvaged under this proposal will be converted to other forest types in the long term by planting red pine or allowing them to naturally regenerate to hardwood and/or aspen. However, two of the stands will be regenerated back to jack pine to maintain short-needle conifer habitat favored by spruce grouse, a Regional Forester's Sensitive Species.

Miscellaneous Timber Stand Improvements

Two mature paper birch stands (2013-24 and 2013-25) were selectively harvested in 1995 to salvage the dying paper birch and encourage the growth of the 15-year old maple and red oak seedlings in the understory. This past harvesting converted the forest type to northern hardwood. Since then the sugar maple saplings have begun crowding out the red oak saplings. Cutting back some of the sugar maples that are encroaching on the red oaks will release the oak saplings.

A 16-year old red pine stand (2182-14) is also in need of release. In 1989 the overmature jack pine growing on the site was clearcut and red pine seedlings were planted two years later. The natural jack pine is now encroaching on the red pine and some of it needs to be removed.

Forest Plan Direction

The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) sets goals and direction for managing the Forests. Goal 1.4 states "Provide terrestrial ecosystems in healthy, diverse, and productive conditions that support the diversity of plant and animal communities and tree species, and have a high likelihood of supporting the viability of native and desired non-native vertebrates and vascular plants well distributed in their ranges within the planning area over time." A Forest Plan Guideline for jack pine management states that harvesting of declining jack pine stands is a high priority (page 2-11).

The Forest is divided into Management Areas (MAs), each with specific standards and guidelines to attain a desired future condition (DFC) of the landscape. The proposed salvage harvest stands are located in MAs 2A, 2B, 2C, 4A, and 8D; while the timber stand improvement areas are located in MAs 2B and 4B. There is no Forest Plan direction relative to any of these management areas that would preclude the proposed activities.

All Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines pertaining to wildlife and fish, soil and water, heritage resources, and vegetation management will be followed. Protection measures include but are not limited to reserving downed logs, snags, and live den trees; buffering streams, lakes, and wetlands; limiting operating seasons; and utilizing Wisconsin's Forestry Best Management Practices.

Categorical Exclusions

The Forest Service has identified typical classes of actions that normally do not require documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) per 40 CFR 1507.3 (b)(2). These types of actions are called categorical exclusions. An action may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or an EA only if the proposed action falls within the categories of actions when there are no extraordinary circumstances that may result in a significant and adverse environmental effect.

The proposed salvage harvest meets FSH 1909.15 § 31.2 paragraph 13 – Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.

The proposed timber stand improvement meets FSH 1909.15 § 31.2 paragraph 6 – Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. There are no known extraordinary circumstances associated with the salvage harvest or timber stand improvement project.

Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

I find there are no extraordinary circumstances present that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. Specifically, the following circumstances were evaluated and found not related (FSH 1909.15 § 30.3(2)):

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.
The Endangered Species Act requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat. As required by this Act, potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (see project file at the Eagle River-Florence Ranger District Office). It was determined that this decision will have "no effect" on any proposed or listed species or their critical habitats, except for the black-backed woodpecker. The removal of dead spruce and jack pine could impact individual woodpeckers since they utilize recently-killed conifer. At least 10 acres of dying spruce will be reserved in stand 2151-2 to meet a Forest Plan guideline: Leave 5-15% of potential timber salvage unharvested following large disturbance events (greater than 100 acres), except in salvage situations that are high risk to human safety and/or forest health (forest Plan, p. 2-5). This, in addition to the acres of untreated lowland conifer habitat and other reserve areas within and adjacent to Spruce Decline I and II harvest stands, resulted in a "May impact individuals but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability" determination for the black-backed woodpecker.

Four stands – 3110-3, 3113-2, 3145-23, and 3146-1 – will require winter wolf track surveys prior to implementation. If a den or rendezvous activity is located in one of these stands, no harvesting will be allowed.

2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, "...the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters, including flood-prone

areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.” Some of the harvest stands are located near floodplains. Impacts will be minimized by following applicable WDNR Best Management Practices for water quality.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “...areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.” Some of the harvest stands are located near wetlands. Impacts will be minimized by following applicable WDNR Best Management Practices for water quality.

Municipal Watersheds: Municipal watersheds are managed under multiple use prescriptions in land and resource management plans. There are no municipal watersheds on the Forest (2004 LRMP FEIS, p.3-4 to 3-34); therefore this decision will not affect municipal watersheds.

3. Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas.

There are no congressionally designated areas located in or near the decision areas; therefore this decision will not affect them.

4. Inventoried roadless areas.

There are no inventoried roadless areas located in or near the decision areas; therefore this decision will not affect them.

5. Research Natural Areas.

There are no Research Natural Areas located in or near the decision areas; therefore this decision will not affect them.

6. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.

The Federal government has trust responsibilities to Tribes under a government-to-government relationship to insure that the Tribes’ reserved rights are protected. Consultation with tribes helps insure that these trust responsibilities are met. The Forest consulted with potentially affected tribes (see project file at the Eagle River-Florence Ranger District Office). No tribal concerns were identified for this project.

7. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment on agency undertakings. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties It affords protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through “in

situ” preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items. This decision complies with the cited Acts. Cultural resource surveys were conducted for archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision (see project file at the Eagle River-Florence Ranger District Office). Recorded sites will be excluded from the projects’ area of potential effect. In addition, when heritage resources are discovered during project implementation, all activities within the vicinity of the discovery area will cease until a professional archaeologist has made an on-site assessment of the discovery, and has consulted with SHPO, ACHP, and other interested parties regarding possible treatment alternatives (Forest Plan, p. 2-29).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A tribal consultation letter was mailed out on December 6th, 2007. One response was received requesting the applicable archaeological report. Public involvement for the project included mailing a public scoping letter to about 100 individuals and organizations, and placing a legal notice in *The Rhinelander Daily News*, Rhinelander, WI, on April 5th, 2007 which established the 30-day comment period. Nine responses were received, with eight commentors supportive of the proposed activities. One commentor asked that den trees be left for wildlife, and that the logging be conducted in the winter. These concerns will be addressed by Forest Plan Guidelines that recommend leaving all dead snags and live den trees up to 10/trees /snags per acre unless they present a safety concern, and leaving existing downed logs greater than 10 inches in diameter (Forest Plan, p. 2-14). Although winter logging will not be a requirement for implementation, heavy equipment will only be operated if soils are not saturated or when the ground is frozen (Forest Plan, p. 2-3).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause this action to have significant effects. There are no significant irretrievable or irreversible commitments of resources needed for this activity.

This action is consistent with the Chequamegon-Nicolet Land and Resource Management Plan, 2004. Other laws and regulation that this project is in compliance with include but are not limited to the following; Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

No substantive comments expressing concerns about this project were received; therefore, this decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Section 215.12 (e).

CONTACT

Detailed records of the environmental analysis are available for public review at the Eagle River Office location, 1247 E. Wall Street, Eagle River, WI 54521, phone (715) 479-2827. A copy of this document is available on request. For additional information concerning this decision, contact Christine Brunner at the above address or phone number, or at cbrunner@fs.fed.us.

SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.15 Chapter 30), and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. My conclusion is based on field visits, information presented in this document, and the entirety of the project file, including the biological evaluation.

Joel H. Skjerven
JOEL H. SKJERVEN
District Ranger

Eagle River-Florence Ranger District
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

02/19/08
Date

Attachments (map, stand lists)

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Tucker Salvage Stand List

Compartment – Stand #	Access	Forest Type	Acres	MA *	Mortality	Prescription	Long-term DFC **
2051-2	FR2508	White spruce	58	8D	15-20%	Salvage spruce and plant red pine	Red pine
2051-7	FR2508	White spruce	14	8D	15-20%	Salvage spruce and plant red pine	Red pine
2148-16	FR2563	White spruce	6	2A	10%	Salvage spruce	Hardwood / Aspen
2150-22	FR2201	White spruce	10	2A	10%	Salvage spruce, aspen, and balsam fir	Hardwood / Aspen
2150-24	FR2563	White spruce	8	2A	10%	Salvage spruce	Hardwood / Red pine / Aspen
2151-1	FR2201	White spruce	9	2A	10-15%	Salvage spruce and plant red pine	Red pine
2172-7	602225	Jack pine	27	4A	10-20%	Salvage jack pine and replant jack pine with some natural aspen	Jack pine / Aspen
2173-2	602218	Jack pine	10	4A	25-30%	Salvage jack pine and replant jack pine	Jack pine
3075-5	FR2402	White spruce	14	2C	30-40%	Salvage spruce and aspen	Hardwood / Aspen
3075-6	FR2402	White spruce	8	2C	30%	Salvage spruce	Aspen
3110-3	Hwy. 70	White spruce	21	2C	50-60%	Salvage spruce and plant red pine	Red pine
3113-2	FR2424	White spruce	16	2C	40-50%	Salvage spruce	Hardwood / Aspen
3145-17	FR2526	White spruce	5	2B	20%	Salvage spruce and plant red pine	Red pine
3145-23	Hwy. 70	White spruce	16	2B	10%	Salvage spruce	Hardwood / Red pine / Aspen
3146-1	FR2172	White spruce	19	2B	10%	Salvage spruce and plant red pine	Hardwood / Red pine / Aspen
Total			241				

* management area

** desired future condition

Tucker Miscellaneous Timber Stand Improvement List

Compartment – Stand #	Forest Type	Acres	Activity
2013 - 24	Northern Hardwood	9.3	Release red oak by hand cutting sugar maple saplings
2013 - 25	Northern Hardwood	6.9	Release red oak by hand cutting sugar maple saplings
2182 - 14	Red Pine	9.6	Release red pine by hand cutting non-commercial jack pine
Total		25.8	

Tucker Salvage and Miscellaneous Timber Stand Improvements Vicinity Map



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Legend

- District Boundary
- Lakes
- Main Roads
- Private Ownership
- Salvage and TSI Stands

