

**DECISION MEMO
USDA FOREST SERVICE**

**Valhalla View CE
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
Washburn Ranger District
Bayfield County, Wisconsin
T49N, R5W, Sections 18 & 30**

Background

On July 7, 2007 a prescribed burn was conducted in an 80 acre oak stand as part of the Sunken Moose project on the Washburn Ranger District. An environmental impact statement was completed for this project and a record of decision (ROD) was signed in October of 2003. The decision for this particular stand was to timber harvest the oak, conduct a prescribe burn to reduce slash and create planting sites and underplant with white pine. This treatment was designed to initiate conversion of the stand from one dominated by oak to one mixed with pine and oak.

A combination of temperatures in the mid-90s and heavy concentrations of dry logging slash resulted in a burn that was much hotter than planned. The majority of the trees were burned up the trunk with all leaves on tree scorched and brown. The result is a stand in which most of the trees died immediately from the severity of the burn, with the ones still alive unlikely to recover due to their weakened condition in conjunction with drought and insect/disease (Davis, 2007 & Loomis, 1973).

Decision

I have decided to conduct salvage harvest on approximately 55 acres of the stand damaged by the prescribed fire. All of the remaining trees with less than 50% green crowns outside of reserve areas would be salvage harvested. The 80 acre site will then be planted with a mix of red and white pine. Road construction, if any, will be temporary and less than ½ mile.

Reasons for the Decision

Dying trees provide a favorable environment for a possible insect and disease infestation due to the weakened condition of the trees. For example, Armillara root rot is a fungus which is present at all times on the forest floor. When trees have been damaged and are stressed this fungus will not only attack the dead and dying trees, but can then migrate into healthier trees and damage them as well. Insects, such as the twolined chestnut borer may also attack, and the resulting buildup in population may infest the nearby drought-stressed oak stands.

By salvage harvesting these dead and dying trees not only would this project address the concerns with insect and disease infestation but would also assist the project area in moving

toward the following Forest Plan Goals: Goal 1.4-Terrestrial Ecosystems, “Provide terrestrial ecosystems in healthy, diverse, and productive conditions (USDA, 2004, p. 1-3).”; Goal 2.5-Forest Commodities, “Contribute toward satisfying demand for wood products and special forest products through environmentally responsible harvest on National Forest System lands (USDA, 2004, p. 1-6).”

Multiple use management of National Forest lands includes the ability to provide a sustainable source of commercial wood products. In situations with damaged, dead, and/or dying timber, salvage harvest is often the most effective means to accomplish a resource objective, such as reducing the risk of insect and disease infestation, *and*, partially recovering the economic value that would otherwise be lost. Salvage cutting, along with the District’s regular timber sale program, allows economic benefits to rural communities and provides wood products to consumers.

Based on my consideration of the analysis documented with the categorical exclusion reviews, I have decided to undertake salvage harvest. Considerable on-forest experience with these types of silvicultural practices has shown them to provide the desired results and be cost-effective. My decision is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Chequamegon-Nicolet Land and Resource Management Plan.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

I have determined that this action falls under the following categories of actions that are normally excluded from documentation in either an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) pursuant to FSH 1909.15:

31.2(#13) Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.

Finding of No Related Extraordinary Circumstances

The natural resources and conditions within the Valhalla View Project have been reviewed by the appropriate resource specialists. I concur with their reviews and 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 Forest Service sensitive species: The project proposal has been reviewed by the District Wildlife Biologist and District Botanist. There are no other federally listed threatened or endangered wildlife or plant species or designated critical habitat in the project area. This stand was included in the Sunken Moose Biological Evaluation where the determination was no effect to threatened and endangered species and may impact individuals, but not likely to cause a trend to federal listing or loss of viability to Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species (USDA, 2004).

2. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: There are no wetlands and floodplains present in the project area.
3. Congressionally designated areas: There are no Wilderness areas, or other specially designated areas within or adjacent to the project area.
4. Inventoried Roadless Areas: There are no inventories Roadless areas within or adjacent to the project area.
5. Research Natural Areas: There are no research natural areas within or adjacent to the project area.
6. American Indian religious or cultural sites: Local and affected Indian tribes were notified about this action. No concerns of religious or cultural sites were brought to my attention.
7. Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. A cultural resource inventory was completed and reviewed by the Forest Archeologist. No archeological, cultural or historical values were identified, and none are anticipated.

Public Involvement

On September 6, 2007, a legal notice with a 30-day comment period was published in the Ashland Daily Press. In addition, a letter detailing the proposed action and maps of the proposed treatments were mailed to approximately 40 groups and individuals. These groups and individuals had indicated on Washburn District's most recent mailing update to be interested in vegetation management projects or were believed to be potentially affected by the proposed project such as adjacent landowners. Letters were also sent to local and affected Tribal entities.

In response, I received 4 letters and/or electronic messages. No comments were received which would indicate the possible presence of extraordinary circumstances or other factors leading to possible environmental significance. Several of the comment letters were in support of the proposed project. One commenter suggested that all of the damaged trees should be harvested instead of those with less than 50% green crowns. Relatively few of the trees outside of reserve areas have crowns that were not scorched more than 50%, so I decided to leave them for additional snags and, if they live, to provide some shade for planted white pine seedlings.

In addition, one commenter disagreed with salvage harvesting in general and suggested it would be better for the trees to be left in place. As I described in the section above, the reasons for my decision to utilize salvage harvest is that it is often the most effective means to accomplish a resource objective, such as reducing the risk of insect and disease infestation, *and*, partially recovering the economic value that would otherwise be lost.

Finding Required by Other Laws & Regulations

I have considered the Forest Plan, relevant laws, regulations, and agency direction. By salvage harvesting dead and dying trees this project would assist the project area in moving toward the

following Forest Plan Goals: Goal 1.4-Terrestrial Ecosystems, “Provide terrestrial ecosystems in healthy, diverse, and productive conditions (USDA, 2004, p. 1-3).”; Goal 2.5-Forest Commodities, “Contribute toward satisfying demand for wood products and special forest products through environmentally responsible harvest on National Forest System lands (USDA, 2004, p. 1-6).”

In addition, the resulting stand from the salvage harvest and underplanting of pine is consistent with the needs described in the Sunken Moose Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (USDA, 2003). The restoration and maintenance of red and white pine communities is one need identified in the EIS. The original proposal for this stand was to initiate conversion of the stand from one dominated by oak to one dominated by white pine. This was envisioned as a long-term process where the final overstory removal of the oak would in 20 years. The damage from the prescribe burn accelerated this plan and the conversion is occurring now instead of 20 years in the future. A second need in the EIS described as “improving resilience of oak communities to minimize mortality and loss from potential gypsy moth damage”. Since oak is a preferred food for the gypsy moth caterpillars, and white pine is one of their least-preferred foods, this conversion would have the effect of greatly reducing the susceptibility of the stand to defoliation by the insect.

I find that my decision complies with the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act. I have considered the direction in the FSM 1950 and FSH 1909.15 and find the analysis and my decision consistent with this direction.

I have reviewed this action in accordance with Executive Order 12898 (Consideration of Environmental Justice). I find that the public scoping was adequate to inform low income and minority populations that may be potentially affected by this action. No concerns of disproportionate health or environmental effects surfaced. Any adverse effects of this action will be extremely minor. Therefore, I find my decision will not disproportionately create high and adverse health or environmental effects to low income or minority populations.

Administrative Review and Implementation Date

This decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215. To appeal this decision, a written notice meeting content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 must be submitted within 45 days following legal notice of decision in the Ashland Daily Press, Ashland, WI to:

USDA, Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
ATTN: Jeanne Higgins, Appeal Deciding Officer
1170 4th Avenue South, Park Falls, WI 54552
email: appeals-eastern-chequamegon-nicolet@fs.fed.us

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.15(a), the legal notice published in the Ashland Daily Press is the exclusive means for calculating time to file an appeal. Only individuals or organizations that submitted comments during the comment period (§ 215.6) may appeal. Electronically submitted appeals shall be in one of the following formats: text (.txt), MSWord 6.0 or higher (.doc), portable document format (.pdf), or rich text format (.rtf). For submission by email, comments

greater than 10 lines (no more than 80 characters per line) shall be electronically attached. If electronic comments are 10 lines or less they may be submitted as an email message using standard messaging software. Business hours for hand-delivered appeals are M-F, 8:00 am – 4:30 pm local time.

If no appeals are received, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period (§ 215.15). If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition (§215.2).

Teresa Chase

Teresa Chase
District Ranger

10-10-07

Date

Literature Cited:

Davis, Tim. 2007. Personal communication regarding prescribed fire in oak.

Loomis, Robert M. 1973. Estimating fire-caused mortality and injury in oak-hickory forests. NC-94. USDA Forest Service Research Paper

USDA, 2003. Sunken Moose Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision and Biological Evaluation. Washburn Ranger District, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

USDA, 2004. Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan. R9-CN-FP. April 2004. www.fs.fed.us/r9/cnnf/natres/final_forest_plan/index.html

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