

File Code: 1950

Date: February 23, 2008

**Subject: Hood River Precommercial Thin
NOXIOUS WEED RISK ASSESSMENT**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Proposed Action: Precommercial thin approximately 5,774 acres of young, overstocked plantations on Hood River Ranger District. The portions of the plantations are within riparian reserves and are typically less than 25 years old, even-aged trees spaced very close together. Units adjacent to streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, seeps and springs would have a 30 foot “no cut” buffer from the high water level (HWL). There would be no ground disturbing machinery in the proposed units. The fuels in the stands would be reduced by a combination of bucking and limbing trees, and by hand pulling the slash twenty-five feet back away from the roads on main roads and up hill side of cut bank and ditch on smaller roads.

After precommercial thinning activities each unit would be reviewed and monitored for fuel loading created from the activity slash. If the analysis indicates that the fuel loading is in excess (greater than 15-25 tons/acre) of the standards and guides (FW-033) of the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan, a new analysis and NEPA document would be prepared to treat the fuels.

EXISTING CONDITION

Noxious weeds are legally recognized by the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) and are defined by the Oregon State Weed Board “as exotic, non-indigenous, species that are injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife or any public or private property”.

Noxious weeds and invasive non-native plants occur in various densities along most roads that provide access to the proposed pre-commercial thin units across the district.

Direction for management of invasive plants in national forest and grasslands of the Pacific Northwest is included in a 2005 environmental impact statement (EIS) that focused primarily on preventing and managing invasive plants. Prevention measures that have been used along roads on the Hood River Ranger District include the release of biological control insects that selectively feed on targeted noxious weeds, and manual/mechanical methods of treatment such as hand pulling and/or mowing noxious weeds where feasible.



Under the 2008 Record of Decision for Site-Specific Invasive Plant Treatments for Mt. Hood National Forest and Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in Oregon the main roads in the vicinity of the precommercial thin units would be treated to control noxious weeds either manually, mechanically, and/or with approved herbicides; there may also be isolated noxious weeds sites along spur roads that would also be treated (see treatment maps Appendix A and noxious weed site maps Appendix B).

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The activity of cutting trees would cause a short term reduction in forest canopy which could provide favorable light conditions for invasive species establishment near the edges of units that are along roadsides. However, there would be no use of machinery and equipment to cause ground disturbance that might create seedbeds for invasive species establishment within the units.

Vehicle traffic is a major vector that spreads noxious weed seeds along roadsides. The use of vehicles by contractors working on the project would be within the current range of existing vehicular traffic across roads on the district, and therefore would not likely cause an unusual increase in the spread for introduction of noxious weeds.

NOXIOUS WEED RISK ASSESSMENT

For projects that have a moderate to high risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds, Forest Service policy requires that decision documents must identify noxious weed control measures that will be undertaken during project implementation (FSM 2081.03, 11/29/95).

The proposed project would have a Moderate Risk of spreading or introducing noxious weeds. Mitigation measures and Prevention Measures are listed below.

The process for risk ranking is detailed on page 3.

PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES / MITIGATION MEASURES

1. No off-road equipment would be allowed on the project site.
2. Request that the contractors, inspectors and Forest Service employees avoid walking and parking in pullouts and roadsides that are infested with noxious weeds, if possible.
3. If the contractors, inspectors and Forest Service employees are working in a unit that has a noxious weed infestation request that they brush off clothing, boots, chaps, etc. and check under the carriage of their vehicle(s) to decrease the risk of transporting seeds from one unit to another.

RISK RANKING**HIGH**

Has to be a combination of the following three factors:

1. Known weeds in/and or adjacent (~ 100 feet) to the project area, in large quantities (High density/acre).
2. Any four or more of vectors # 1 - 8 in the immediate project area.
3. Project operation activities not able to avoid weed populations.

X MODERATE

Has to be a combination of the following three factors:

1. Known weeds in/and or adjacent (~ 100 feet) to the project area, in moderate quantities (Moderate density/acre).
2. No more than three of vectors # 1 - 8 present in the immediate project area.
3. Project operation activities are not able to avoid weed populations.

LOW

Has to be one or the other or both factors:

1. No more than two of vectors # 1 - 8 present in the immediate project area.
2. No Known weeds in/and or adjacent (~ 100 feet) to the project area without vectors

*Vectors (if contained in the project proposal) ranked in order of weed introduction risk:

1. Heavy equipment (implied ground disturbance)
2. Importing soil, cinders, or gravel
3. OHV/ATV's (mountain bikers, motorcycles, 4-wheelers etc.)
4. Grazing livestock (long-term disturbance)
5. Pack animals (short-term disturbance)
6. Plant restoration (active restoration, soil scarification, seeding, etc.)
7. Recreationists/General Public (hikers, hunters, camping, mushroom/firewood gathering)
8. Forest Service/contractor project vehicles

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