

## Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

# Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale

USDA Forest Service  
Cowlitz Valley Ranger District, Gifford Pinchot National Forest  
Lewis County, Washington

T. 14 N., R. 9 E., T. 13 N., R. 9 E., T. 13 N., R. 8 E., Willamette Meridian

## Decision and Reasons for the Decision

### Background

The Cowlitz Valley Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest is proposing for sale during fiscal year 2007 the Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale, which is located approximately due north of the town of Packwood. The purpose of this project is to

1. Thin and harvest wood fiber from approximately 760 acres,
2. Thin and harvest 92 acres of riparian reserves,
3. Enhance growth and vigor of managed stands,
4. Enhance, restore and protect Riparian Reserves,
5. Retain and enhance key structural elements of suitable and potential Northern spotted owl habitat within plantations and naturally regenerated stands.

The Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale, which is located approximately due north of the town of Packwood in T. 14 N., R. 9 E. Sections 25, 26, 35, 36; T. 13 N., R. 9 E. Sections 2, 4, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20; T. 13 N., R. 8 E. Sections 3, 11, 12, and 13, Willamette Meridian, Skamania County, Washington.

The action is needed (a) to meet Forest timber targets assigned through the Forest budgeting process, (b) to treat densely stocked managed stands to enhance vigor and growth, to (c) enhance late-successional structural elements of stands that regenerated naturally, but have been managed in the past, and to (d) treat one densely stocked managed stand that is located within an LSR to accelerate the development of late-successional characteristics.

The Forest Service evaluated the no-action alternative and action alternatives, which vary by degree of enhancement of late-successional features such as the placement of skips, gaps, down wood and snag creation, and by whether naturally regenerated stands are treated or not. The preferred alternative harvests thinned trees using skyline and ground-based yarding methods, and attempts to retain and restore structural elements that characterize late-successional and riparian forests, in addition to retaining features and structures that are representative of habitat important to northern spotted owls. It reduces the amount of soil disturbance that would occur with ground-based logging systems by utilizing existing skid trails and roads created during previous logging entries, and limits the amount of ground-based logging that would occur in proximity to streams. The placement of significantly-sized skips and gaps and the retention of existing legacy features is a key component of all alternatives. Additional projects would improve drainage conditions, treat roads and restore instream habitat within unit boundaries, treat illegal ATV roads and identifies future needs for road treatments within the project area that would require additional funding from other sources. The environmental analysis (EA) for this project (April

2007) identified resource needs (EA page 3), and management objectives (EA, pgs 4-5) that are intended to move the area closer toward the desired future condition of the landscape, as identified in the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan), as amended. The recommendations of the *Upper Cowlitz Watershed Analysis* are actions identified as necessary to attain the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives, which are discussed in this Decision Notice, the EA (pg 134), with additional detailed analysis in the Fisheries Biological Assessment.

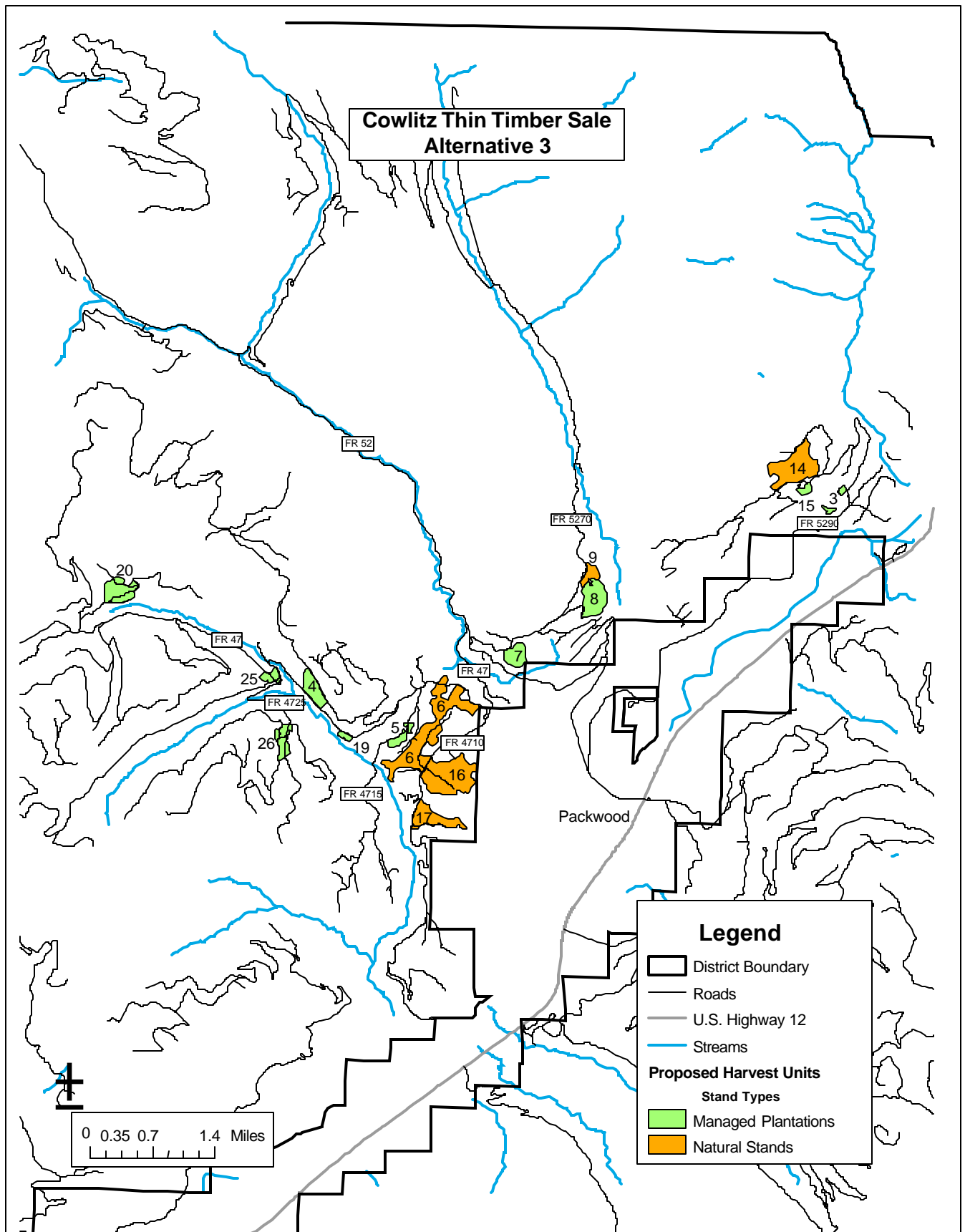
The Cowlitz Thin was derived from a planning effort undertaken in 1997, which identified nearly 2000 acres of thinning and regeneration harvest. The Cowlitz Thin took a new look at stands in the area and identified up to 1600 acres of potential commercial thinning opportunities. The environmental assessment documents the analysis of three alternatives to meet the project need, in addition to the no action alternative. The final proposal treats 760 acres of young and mature previously managed stands and one mature unmanaged stand (Unit 9).

## **Decision**

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 3, the Modified Proposed Action. This decision includes all of the required mitigation, project design criteria and monitoring objectives defined in the EA, and are provided here as Appendix A. This alternative will treat approximately 760 acres, using skyline and ground-based logging systems. The proposal has modified unit design to reduce temporary roads based on public input from 3.3 acres to 2.1 miles. After completion of timber sale activities, landings and temporary roads will be sub-soiled and revegetated. Table 1 summarizes the project activities for Alternative 3 of the Cowlitz Thin. Restoration activities that are included as part of this action are listed in Appendix B. Additional mitigation measures were added in response to public comments, and monitoring objectives were inadvertently omitted in the EA. These are also provided in Appendix B. Our response to public comments is provided in Appendix A.

When compared alternatives 1, 2, and 4 this alternative better responds to the issues and management objectives used to formulate alternatives and develop site-specific activities. This alternative meets requirements under the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* as amended, the *Upper Cowlitz Watershed Analysis* and the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Roads Analysis*.

In addition to the stand treatment and harvest activities described above, additional projects and opportunities would be implemented with KV or other sources of funding with this decision. These projects, as well as others that may require additional analysis are attached as an appendix to this document and response to comments in the appendix to the EA.



**Figure 1.** Alternative 3, the modified proposed alternative. Detailed unit maps are available in the appendix.

**Table 1.** Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale, Alternative 3 details.

Unit	Total Acres	Harvest Type	Treated Acres	Acres by Log. Sys.	RD <sup>1</sup>	Canopy Closure % <sup>1</sup>	Volume (MBF)	Slash Disposal <sub>2</sub>
3	9	HTH	9	Grd. 9	43	58-63	111	LS
4	38	HTH	27	Sky. 27	41	65-70	314	LS**
5	19	HTH	16	Grd. 16	41	58-63	158	LS
6	177	HTH	123	Grd. 105 Sky. 18	52	68-73	1608	LS**
7	33	HTH	28	Grd. 28	26	41-46	176	LS**
8	60	HTH	50	Grd. 50	30	40-45	274	LS
9	18	HTH	13	Sky. 13	50	57-62	85	LS**
14	103	HTH	47	Grd. 47	38	61-66	166	LS**
15	9	HTH	7	Grd. 7	37	58-63	33	LS
16	129	HTH	89	Grd. 84 Sky. 5	38	68-73	582	LS
17	56	HTH	39	Grd. 39	43	69-74	414	LS
19	7	HTH	7	Sky. 7	40	58-63	69	LS**
20	54	HTH	45	Grd. 13 Sky. 32	35	56-61	314	LS
25	17	HTH	14	Grd. 14	33	58-63	57	LS**
26	31	HTH	26	Grd. 23 Sky. 3	30	53-58	126	LS
<b>Total</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>HTH</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>Grd. 435 Sky. 105</b>			<b>4487</b>	<b>LS</b>

<sup>1</sup>The Relative Density (RD) and Canopy Closure % data represent only the treatment acres of each unit. If the no-cut skip and no-cut riparian reserve acres were included these numbers would be higher than what is shown.

<sup>2</sup>LS: Lop and scatter all units, pile and burn at landings. \*\*Hand pile and burn 100 ft strip along 5290 (Unit 14), 5270 (Units 7 and 9), 4700 (Units 4, 6, 19, 25)

## Rationale for the Decision

All alternatives except the No Action alternative met the purpose and need statements listed in the EA to some degree. Alternative 3 optimizes all objectives through the treatment of 760 acres of historically managed stands, including younger plantations and mature, naturally regenerated stands, and one overstocked and unmanaged, mature and naturally regenerated stand (see EA page 16). Alternative 3, like most of the alternatives, consists of design features that are intended to increase stand diversity and retain late-successional characteristics that are lacking in previously managed stands, and have been reduced in managed older stands. Implementation of Alternative 3 would result in healthy productive forests, and would provide forest products in a way that is sustainable, and preserves options for the future. The treatment of Riparian Reserves is expected to accelerate the development of mature and late-successional stand conditions (see EA pages 16-19, 39).

**2.2** miles of temporary road construction would be required, and all volume would be yarded using skyline or ground-based harvest methods. The amount of temporary road and landings that would be required to harvest each unit is provided in Appendix B. The proposed action

includes the implementation of mitigation measures and road treatments that would minimize sediment delivery and restore ground disturbance created during harvest activities. Snags and down-wood would be created, and minor species such as western red cedar, red alder, black cottonwood, big leaf maple would be favored and retained to promote and increase species diversity. Large skips and gaps would be implemented as discussed above.

Finally Alternative 3 allows the harvest of older stands in Matrix through the careful consideration of habitat needs. While Alternative 3 harvests less volume than Alternative 2, the project was intentionally designed to retain what late successional features are left in the stands through the establishment of carefully selected skips (30% of mature stands), enhance the current condition by retaining and adding down wood and snags, and by adding some structural variability while capturing potential competition-induced mortality through thinning. This approach attempts to address several issues including effects to suitable habitat of the northern spotted owl, deer and elk winter range, the construction of temporary roads and social issues including concerns regarding the effects of harvest activity on the town of Packwood. Alternative 3 provides an innovative approach to ecosystem management that speaks to all issues presented, and provides an opportunity to speed the development of late-successional characteristics, while providing a sustainable source of wood products to the area economy.

Unconnected actions including restoration project proposals within the project action area would be similar under all alternatives, and implemented as funding becomes available. These projects are listed in the Appendix.

## **Other Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 12-37.

Under Alternative 1 (the No Action alternative), current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area, and there would be no thinning of the Cowlitz planning area at this time. Alternative 1 was not selected because the younger stands would continue to be overstocked, which delays the growth and development of larger trees and structural development of late successional features. There would also be no opportunities to practice and observe the results of various methods of thinning and related vegetation management activities to determine how best to manage stands to meet the desired future condition for the planning area. Alternative 1 also fails to accelerate the development of mature and late-successional stand conditions in the riparian reserves. Finally, Alternative 1 would not meet the Northwest Forest Plan goal and Matrix objectives of providing a sustainable and reliable supply of forest products.

Alternative 2, the original proposed action, would have treated the same stands as Alternative 3. However, Alternative 2 would have maximized volume production over retention of the highest quality spotted owl habitat. Down wood, snag levels and skips would have been lower than in Alternative 3. This alternative addressed all objectives because it did maintain 15% skips and created snags and down wood. Ground disturbance related to temporary road, skid trail and landing construction would have been similar under this alternative, although higher extracted volume would have resulted in higher potential for sediment delivery to heavier use of haul roads, temporary roads, landings and skid trails. Some proposed temporary roads were eliminated due to the placement of skips under Alternative 3.

Alternative 4 would have treated fewer acres than Alternatives 2 and 3, and would have provided the least amount of forest products to the local economy. The type of treatment within Alternative 4 units would have been similar to treatments in younger, managed stands under Alternative 2. Fewer temporary roads would have been constructed, and less ground disturbance would have occurred, and mature stands and suitable spotted owl habitat would not have been entered. However, Alternative 4 would not have treated as many stands in Matrix lands and therefore not met Northwest Forest Plan goals and Matrix objectives of providing a sustainable and reliable supply of forest products in the mature stands. Lower harvest volume would result in fewer opportunities to treat stands via KV.

## **Public Involvement**

After considering the issues and objectives to be achieved by this project, a project proposal was developed. Scoping letters describing the proposed action and issues identified by the interdisciplinary team were sent to the public on August 25, 2006 to solicit comments. Public comment on the proposed action was also solicited through the Gifford Pinchot's quarterly Schedule of Proposed Action (SOPA) website. A public meeting and field trip was held on October 23, 2006 in Packwood, Washington to identify public issues and concerns.

Representatives of the Gifford Pinchot Task Force, Conservation Northwest, Pinchot Partners collaborative working group, and members of the community of Packwood have visited the project area, and have provided recommendations related to proposed silvicultural treatments and potential restoration activities, and expressed concerns about components of the proposed action.

Several responses were received during the scoping period for the proposed Cowlitz Thin, and throughout the period of time preceding and following the public meeting. Comments within the scope of the Project and not covered by previous environmental review or existing regulations were reviewed for substantive content related to the Project. It was determined that concerns regarding management of natural stands and the proximity of units near local communities should be given further consideration.

The interdisciplinary team identified issues, which also led to the development and design of alternatives. The proposed action has been significantly modified to address issues and concerns raised by the public and the interdisciplinary team. Alternative-driving issues were identified and included:

1. Stand Health and Treatment of Stands with Significant Laminated Root Rot
2. Harvest of Mature and Naturally Regenerated Stands
3. Effects on the Northern Spotted Owl Habitat and Critical Habitat

Other issues included deer and elk winter range, survey and manage and sensitive species, federally listed wildlife species, slope stability and productivity, water quantity, water quality, federally listed anadromous salmon, recreation activities, Packwood viewshed and public safety, and economic feasibility. Temporary road construction was a public issue that was not considered significant; however, this issue was addressed within the context of other issues in the effects analysis, through the development of mitigation measures and project design criteria. Furthermore, the final amount of temporary road construction was reduced from 3.3 miles to 2.2 in response to public comments and through the process of identifying skip locations. Details of these changes are provided in Appendix B.

A legal notice announcing the availability of the Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale Environmental Assessment for review and comment was published in the *Chronicle* newspaper (newspaper of record) on April 25, 2007. The 30-day comment period ended on May 25, 2007. One organization submitted written comments within the comment period. Copies of letters of comment, including those received outside of the comment period are in the Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale project analysis file. Substantive comments received are summarized along with Forest Service responses in Appendix B of this document.

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. Travel to and from harvest sites along Forest Roads may be affected by log truck traffic. Signage and posting signs communicating location and time periods of harvest and haul would mitigate this potential effect. (EA page 141).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, including unique or ecologically critical areas such as historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, or wild and scenic rivers. There are no park lands, farmlands, or rangelands within the Cowlitz Thin planning area. There are no significant sites and there would be no effect on cultural and heritage resources (see EA page 138). There would be no adverse effects to wetlands or floodplains due to the implementation of project design criteria and mitigation measures.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (see EA pages 144-146). There is opposition by some to any harvest activity within mature stands; however, the local community, while originally opposed are generally in support because of the elimination of one unit near the High Valley area (Analysis File, Comments to the EA).
5. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest has considerable experience with the types of harvest and restoration activities to be implemented. I have determined that the effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA, Chapter 4).
6. I find that this action is one of several similar actions undertaken on National Forest System lands, and is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represent a decision in principle. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest is one of numerous administrative units of the Forest Service that have previously undertaken this type of action.

7. Cumulative impacts are addressed by issue in Chapter 4 of the EA. I find that this action along with other past, present and foreseeable future actions on both public and private lands would not result in cumulatively significant impacts.
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because there are no such structures or objects in the area. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, because these resources are not only documented, but avoided (see EA page 138).
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. All construction activities will follow conservation measures to avoid, minimize, or otherwise offset effects to aquatic resources described in the *Endangered Species Act Section 7 Informal Consultations and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultations for the Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale, Cowlitz Valley Ranger District*, April 26, 2007). The National Marine Fisheries Service concurred with the determination that the project *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* listed salmonids or their habitat (NOAA Fisheries Letter of Concurrence, *Endangered Species Act Section 7 Informal Consultations and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultations for the ... Cowlitz Thin Timber Sale, Cowlitz Valley Ranger District, Gifford Pinchot National Forest*, April 26, 2007).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the determination that the Cowlitz Thin project *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* the threatened northern spotted owl, designated spotted owl critical habitat unit WA-36, the threatened gray wolf, the northern bald eagle, the marbled murrelet, and a *beneficial effect* to designated marbled murrelet Critical Habitat Unit WA-11-d. (USFWS Letter of Concurrence, May 17, 2007).

10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see pages 4-5, 144-146). The action is consistent with the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* as amended.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

As required by the national Forest Management Act, this decision is tiered to the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990), as amended by the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (1994), Amendments to the Survey & Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (2001) (LRMP)*. I find that the only irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources will be the limited use of rock for existing road surfacing and the potential and relatively small loss of soil productivity on landings and temporary roads. All landings and temporary roads are considered temporary, and will be sub-soiled and revegetated following completion of the project (EA page 144).



This decision is based on the following additional factors to assure consistency with the National Forest Management Act of 1976:

*This action is best suited to the goals in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest LRMP.* The Gifford Pinchot National Forest LRMP as amended provides management direction through the designation of specific management areas, and standards and guidelines specific to these designations. The EA discusses these goals on pages 4 and 5 of the EA. This decision is responsive to those goals, and is best suited to meet those goals.

*Lands can be adequately restocked within five years after final harvest when trees are cut to achieve timber production.* Restocking is not applicable; the area treated will remain fully stocked after treatment as described in the silvicultural prescription. All treatments are commercial thinning.

*This decision is not based on the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber (although these factors shall be considered).* This decision was based on several reasons, one of which was economic benefit. The most economical alternative was not selected however; this decision is based on factors most responsive to the purpose and need for the action and the stated goals and objectives in the LRMP as amended.

*Potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands have been considered.* The effects on residual trees and adjacent stands were considered in development of the LRMP, and this decision is consistent with the LRMP. The analysis considered effects to residual trees through the application and design of alternatives that minimize those potential effects (EA pages 12-22).

*This action was selected to avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and to ensure conservation of soil and water resources.* This decision avoids impairment of site productivity. The nature of the decision and use of Best Management Practices, Project Design Criteria, and the Mitigation Measures will protect soil and water resources.

*This action was selected to provide the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation users, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.* The nature of the decision and use of Best Management Practices, Project Design Criteria, and the Mitigation Measures will protect soil and water resources. This decision is consistent with the LRMP and provides the desired effect on the above resources.

*This action is practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging and administration.* The project area has adequate access, no new permanent roads are necessary to implement this decision. The treatment in this decision is appropriate to accomplish project objectives, and is economically practical. The benefit to cost ratio is positive (EA page 143).

I find that this action is consistent with the *Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Management Competing and Unwanted Vegetation* (USDA, 1988b) as amended by the *Amendment to the 1988 Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation* (USDA, 1992), further supplemented by the Mediated Agreement. Specific mitigation is included by this decision to prevent or control the spread of noxious weeds within the project area and along roads.

I find that this action is in compliance with the 2001 Survey and Manage Record of Decision and the Pechman Order issued October 11, 2007. No further surveys or documentation are necessary for botanical or animal species. Beard lichen (*Usnea longissima*) and Puget Oregonian snail (*Cryptomastix devia*) were located (see EA pages 69 and 79). Buffers will be located to protect species and associated host trees from impacts during harvest.

I find that this action is consistent with the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-267), which amended the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act). Because Essential Fish Habitat will not be adversely affected for any of these species, no consultation is necessary.

I find that all applicable state and federal requirements associated with the Clean Water Act (CWA) will be met through planning, application, and monitoring of Best Management Practices in conformance with the CWA and Federal guidance and management direction.

I find that this action will not prevent attainment of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy Objectives, as defined in the *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (1994, pp. B-9 through B-11):

1. *Maintain and restore the distribution, diversity, and complexity of watershed and landscape scale features to ensure protection of the aquatic systems to which species, populations and communities are uniquely adapted.* Landscape scale diversity will be maintained through the system of no harvest riparian reserves on 32 acres of inner reserve. Riparian silvicultural treatment prescriptions are expected to restore plant structural and species diversity on 62 acres. Maintaining high relative density in managed and unmanaged stands along with selective “skipping” of 30% harvest areas, including the majority of relic old-growth features will contribute to the restoration of natural variability. Creating 3-5% down-wood in the outer and inner reserve will restore riparian bio-diversity. Overall low magnitude and duration of treatment activities on 92 riparian acres is insignificant to the 54,298 acre analysis area.

2. *Maintain and restore temporal connectivity within and between watersheds...* Minor short term development of 0.1 mile of temporary road within a riparian reserve, including 1 new intermittent stream crossing will have a limited and temporary impact on connectivity, and will allow the treatment of young, previously managed riparian reserves. Removing and restoring pre-existing stream crossings will restore connectivity (units 4, 5, and 15). Managing stands to maintain and enhance existing late-successional features will improve connectivity of late successional habitat locally and contribute to connectivity at the watershed scale.

3. *Maintain and restore the physical integrity of the aquatic system, including shorelines, banks, and bottom conditions.* The riparian reserve setback will maintain the physical integrity of the aquatic system. Minor short term development of 0.1 mile of riparian temp road including 1 new stream crossing (unit 3) will all occur on an intermittent stream and will have insignificant impact on connectivity. Removal and reconfiguration of three preexisting stream crossings will restore or maintain physical integrity of banks.

4. *Maintain and restore water quality necessary to support healthy riparian, aquatic, and wetland ecosystems...* There should be no effect to water quality to an extent that will impact any life history of aquatic organisms. Local disturbance at one stream crossing and 0.1 miles of new temporary riparian road may produce an insignificant level of sediment. Pre-existing log bunked stream crossing removal may have a short term insignificant increase in fine material and restore water quality in the long term. Implementation of mitigation measures, project design criteria and best management practices will limit the introduction of sediment where log haul traffic crosses Smith Creek. There should be no effect to water chemistry.

5. *Maintain and restore the sediment regime under which ecosystems evolved.* The character of sediment delivery should remain at baseline levels. A system of riparian reserve no cut buffers along with high forest retention and down wood will serve to trap any potential sediment mobilized by an approximate 79.4 acres of disturbance (includes areas outside of riparian reserve). Timing restrictions and post harvest erosion control measures should help maintain near natural levels of sediment delivery. One new stream crossing may have a short term increase in sediment but it is likely to be short term, low duration and magnitude and therefore insignificant. Removal of three preexisting crossings should restore the transport function back into the aquatic system.

6. *Maintain and restore in-stream flows ...* Impact to water yield will remain neutral due to high forest relative density on 613 acres, which will serve to intercept rain and dissipate excessive rates of snow melt and moderate peak flows. Approximately 2.1 total miles of temporary road construction is not expected to have an effect on water yield and is expected to remain at baseline levels. All temporary roads will be subsoiled and restored.

7. *Maintain and restore the timing, variability, and duration of floodplain inundation and water table elevation in meadows and wetlands.* No ground disturbing activities are proposed in wetlands or meadows. There are no significant causal mechanisms expected to change water yield (see ACSO #6), channel connectivity (see ACSO #2), nor the channel forming process (see ACSO #3) therefore this objective should be fully met.

8. *Maintain and restore the species composition and structural diversity of plant communities in riparian areas and wetlands...* The function and process of wetlands and no-cut riparian areas will be maintained; silvicultural treatments in treated riparian reserves will enhance structural diversity. High forest retention (26-52 RD) will maintain thermo regulation; recruitment of 3-5 % down wood will restore coarse woody material, which will contribute to the restoration of stability and complexity to riparian areas. Selective skips in 30% of the harvest area protecting late successional features will also maintain and contribute to the restoration of diversity.

9. *Maintain and restore habitat to support well-distributed populations of native plant, invertebrate, and vertebrate riparian-dependent species.* Riparian habitat will be maintained in unmanaged stands and restored in managed stands. Thinning overstocked stands will promote structural diversity. Creating 3-5 % down wood will enhance microhabitat conditions necessary for most riparian species. No harvest buffers and 30% “skip” areas will maintain the physical integrity of most legacy features.

I find that this action does not violate other Federal, State or local laws designed for the protection of the environment.

## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215 (revised, June 2004). The written appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer at

Gifford Pinchot National Forest  
Claire Lavendel, Appeal Deciding Officer,  
10600 NE 51<sup>st</sup> Circle, Vancouver, WA 98682

FAX (360) 891-5045  
email: [appeals-pacificnorthwest-giffordpinchot@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-pacificnorthwest-giffordpinchot@fs.fed.us).

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc) or portable document format (.pdf). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification. E-mails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed or containing viruses, will be rejected. It is the responsibility of the appellant to confirm receipt of appeals submitted by electronic mail.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in *The Chronicle*, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in *The Chronicle*, newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

## Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Karen Thompson, North Zone Planning Team Leader during normal office hours at the Cowlitz Valley Ranger District office (10024 Hwy 12, Randle, WA 98377; (360) 497-1136 (voice); (360) 497-1101 (TDD); Fax (360) 497-1102; email: [karenmthompson@fs.fed.us](mailto:karenmthompson@fs.fed.us)).

Kristie L. Miller  
**KRISTIE L. MILLER**  
District Ranger  
Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

June 8, 2007

Date