

Decision Memo:
Road 6801 Stabilization

USDA Forest Service
Gifford Pinchot National Forest
Mount Adams Ranger District
Skamania County, Washington
T. 4N, R. 8E, S. 4

Purpose and Need

In the winter of 2004, a culvert located at milepost 4.0 on Road 6801 became plugged with debris and overwhelmed with water. Overflow water from this culvert ran down the road and overcharged another culvert which ultimately failed. The failure of the culverts resulted in loss of much of the fill and the road surface at this site, and since the time of the failure, the road has been impassable. Sediment from the site has continued to enter the stream due to a combination of dry ravel and erosion of the remaining oversteepened fill. Fine-grained sediments from this site degrade water quality and fish habitat in Big Huckleberry Creek and Panther Creek, a stream that supports Lower Columbia River steelhead. In addition, the failed culverts remain—at least partially—in place and pose a continued risk of plugging and failure. This project will remove the two culverts along with associated unstable fill material remaining at the stream crossings. The purpose of the project is to stabilize the site, reduce sediment inputs to Big Huckleberry Creek, and to remove the potential for future failures at this location.

The project site is located in the Panther Creek drainage of the Wind River watershed, which is identified as a Tier I Key Watershed under the Northwest Forest Plan. Panther Creek and the Wind River support Lower Columbia River Steelhead, a fish listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Road 6801 is approximately 7.5 miles long and is a tie-through road connecting Road 68 with Road 60. Road 6801 lies within lands designated as Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), and is in part within the Panther Creek Division of the Wind River Experimental Forest. The project is located near milepost 4.0, which is approximately 1.5 miles north of the Experimental Forest. The Wind River Roads Analysis identified Road 6801 as a high risk to aquatic resources due in part to the number and condition of stream crossings on the road. The failed culverts to be removed are on a segment of road identified in the Roads Analysis as “Single Purpose—Silviculture”.

The failure of Road 6801 effectively blocked through travel on the road, but because the road can be accessed from both Road 6800 on the south end, and Road 6000 on the north end, all areas that were accessed by Road 6801 before the failure are still accessible, with the exception of approximately 150 feet of road that is between the two failed culverts. This project would not change the access currently provided by Road 6801, but would stabilize conditions at the site of the failure to reduce sediment introduction to the stream and allow free passage of water and debris through the site.

Proposed Action

The project proposal for this site includes the removal of approximately 2500 cubic yards of fill material from the two affected stream crossings. This material will be placed in a stable location on the road prism away from the streams. The two damaged culverts at the failed road crossing sites will be removed and recycled or disposed of. Slopes adjacent to these stream crossings will be shaped to a stable angle of repose, and all disturbed sites will then be stabilized with vegetation and mulch. Berms and waterbars would be constructed on either side of the excavation to route water away from the excavated surfaces, as well as to prevent vehicles from traveling over the worksites. Berms would be located near turnouts so that vehicles have a place to turn around. During project activities, erosion control practices would be employed to reduce the amount of sediment reaching the streams. Straw bales would be temporarily installed in the streams downstream of project activities to promote deposition and filtering of any sediment that is introduced to the stream during construction. The project would occur in late summer 2006, and the entire project would take approximately two weeks to complete. All earthwork would be done with an excavator and truck. Erosion control and revegetation work would be done by hand. These measures would accelerate recovery of the site and reduce surface erosion, and would meet the project objectives of stabilizing the road and reducing sediment introduction to Panther Creek and Big Huckleberry Creek.

Decision

I have decided to implement the project as described above. The project location is shown on the attached map. This decision includes the following required mitigation, which are further described in the project file:

1. All work will be conducted in the summer months during annual low stream flows.
2. Site disturbance will be kept to the smallest footprint practical.
3. All disturbed areas will be treated for erosion control by application of weed-free straw mulch and will then be seeded with native grasses.
4. Heavy equipment used for this project will be cleaned prior to entering the National Forest to remove any debris that may contain noxious weed seed.
5. The project will be consistent with Project Design Criteria and Terms and Conditions identified in the Biological Opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service for Programmatic Activities on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (2004).
6. The project will be consistent with standards identified in the Pacific Northwest Region Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Invasive Plant Program (2005).

This action falls within a set of actions that may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under FSH 1909.15, Sec. 31.12, para. 4: "Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries", provided there are no extraordinary circumstances that could potentially be significantly impacted by this action (FSH 1909.15, Sec. 30.3 (2)). This category of actions does not normally require documentation in a Decision Memo or maintenance of a project file, however due to the public interest in road activities in this

area, I have directed that public scoping be conducted and this decision be documented in a Decision Memo.

No significant issues were identified with this project. Substantive scoping comments were received from one member of the public and one environmental organization. These comments yielded two alternative approaches to this project. One suggestion was to decommission the entire 6801 Road, and the other was to reconnect the road at the failed crossings. Both of these proposals would require additional engineering and environmental analysis. These proposals are outside the scope of this project, and go well beyond the purpose and need of reducing an immediate and ongoing source of sediment at the failed culvert site. Because these proposals would each require extended analysis, they would delay efforts to correct the immediate ongoing sediment issue that affects water quality and fish habitat. A delay in the project would also mean leaving the two undersized pipes in place and continued risk of a secondary failure at this site. Implementation of the project as proposed in this Memo would not preclude acting on either of these proposals in the future in conjunction with future transportation and access reviews.

Thus I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially significantly affected by this action. I considered the potential effects to water quality, listed fish and wildlife species, botanical and cultural resources, and proximity to the Experimental Forest.

Public Involvement

Public and agency (Pacific Northwest Forest Experiment Station) comment was solicited for this proposal in a formal scoping letter dated May 23, 2006 and mailed to interested public and agency contacts. The proposal was also provided to Mt Adams District resource specialists for their review and analysis. Resource specialist comments and recommendations are documented in the project file along with two comments received from external scoping efforts.

Finding of Consistency with National Forest Management Act

This action complies with management objectives and Standards and Guidelines for Late-Successional Reserves and Riparian Reserves from the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (1990), as amended by the *Record of Decision for Management of Habitat for Late Successional and Old Growth Forest Related Species with the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (1994), hereinafter referred to as the “Northwest Forest Plan”. The amended Land and Resource Management Plan is referred to as “Amendment 11” in this document. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for activities in Riparian Reserves (Amendment 11, pages 2-59 through 2-62). Therefore, I find that this action is consistent with the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, Lower Columbia River Steelhead. It is covered

under the Biological Opinion issued by National Marine Fisheries Service covering programmatic activities on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area (*Endangered Species Act—Section 7 Consultation Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation, July 26, 2004*). The project falls under the category of Road Decommissioning, Obliteration, Stabilization and Inactivation, and is consistent with Project Design Criteria (PDC's) and Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion.

There will be no effects to federally listed wildlife species, sensitive animal or plant species, or species that are identified as "Survey and Manage" species in the Northwest Forest Plan.

The project design and mitigation will ensure compliance with the *Record of Decision for the Invasive Plant Environmental Impact Statement* (2005), in particular with standards: 2, 3, 7, and 13.

There are no impacts to resources of cultural or historical significance; therefore this action is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act.

This action complies with standards of the federal Clean Water Act (1948, amended 1972) and the federal Clean Air Act (1955, amended 1970, 1977, 1990).

This action does not violate other federal, state, or local laws designed for the protection of the environment.

Other Findings

Public health and safety will not be affected by this action.

This action does not affect prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The effects of this action are not highly controversial and do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

This decision does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This action is not related to any other actions that would have significant cumulative impacts.

Implementation Date

This project will be implemented in the summer of 2006.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Bengt Coffin, Hydrologist, Mount Adams Ranger District, ph.: (509) 395-3425.

/s/ *Nancy Ryke*

7/27/2006

Nancy Ryke
District Ranger

Date

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