

DECISION MEMO
DRY CREEK COMMERCIAL THINNING PROJECT
USDA Forest Service
Mt. Adams Ranger District, Gifford Pinchot National Forest
Skamania County, Washington
Section 17, T5N, R7E, W. M.

With the aim of developing structural diversity and accelerating the development of late successional forest conditions, approximately 69 acres of dense 55 year-old timber within the Wind Late Successional Reserve (LSR) in the Dry Creek area on the Mt. Adams Ranger District was identified for thinning. The proposed Dry Creek Commercial Thinning project area is located within the Wind River Watershed in Section 17, T5N, R7E, W. M. (Figure 1).

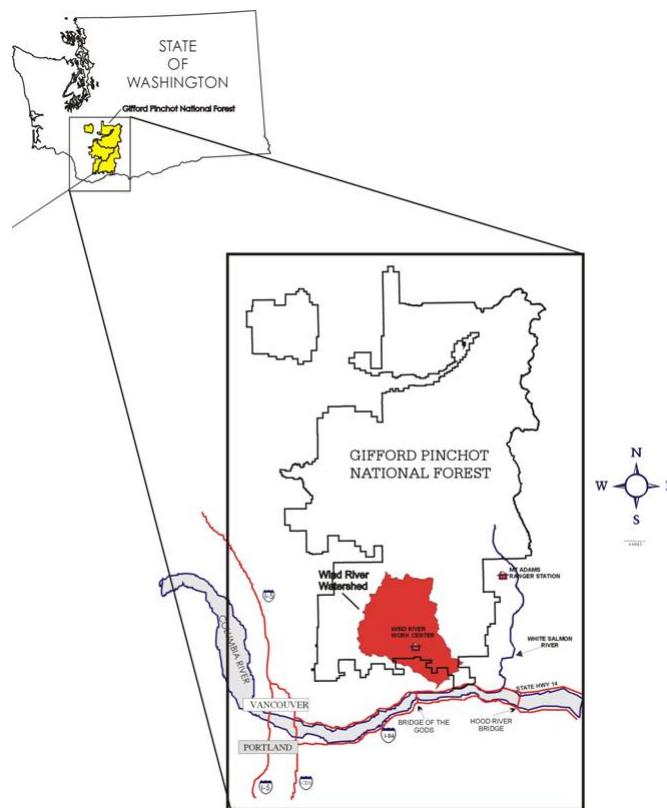


Figure 1. Dry Creek Commercial Thinning project area location.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The proposed 69-acre unit is located within lands allocated as General Late-Successional Reserve by the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (1990) as amended by the *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Plans Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* [(1994), also known as the Northwest Forest Plan]. The objective of these lands is to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems, which serve as habitat for late-successional and old growth related species, including the northern spotted owl. This portion of the watershed has also been designated a Tier 1 Key Watershed, under the Northwest Forest Plan. Key

watersheds are a system of large refugia comprising watersheds that are crucial to at-risk, anadromous fish stocks. Lower Columbia River Steelhead, a threatened species, occupies the Wind River.

The treatment area is a planted 54-year old stand of predominantly Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) scattered western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*), red alder (*Alnus rubra*), and big leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*). Trees average 12.4" diameter measured at breast height. Canopy closure of the stand averages 80%.

The purpose of the proposed action is to develop structural diversity and accelerate the development of late successional forest conditions within the Wind LSR (i.e., herb, shrub, two tree layers, and large crowned trees). Currently, the stand, proposed for thinning in even-aged and contains a high density of trees that are currently experiencing inter-tree competition for light, water, and nutrients. These conditions, if not managed, will limit and/or delay the attainment of large, old-growth trees; a key characteristic of the LSR desired future condition. Thinning would attain large diameter individual trees than would otherwise be possible in young, fully stocked forest stands. In addition, thinning in stands that are relatively uniform in stocking, species composition, and tree size can enhance structural complexity and species heterogeneity.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would be to thin from below which means that the smaller trees surrounding the largest trees within the stand would be cut to accelerate the growth of the more dominant trees. Ten percent of the project area would be left in unthinned patches, 3% of the area would be in created gaps (½- to ¼ -acre openings), 10% of the area would be heavily thinned to an approximate 50-70 trees/acre (25-30% canopy closure), and the remainder of the area would be thinned to an approximately 95-110 trees/acre (40% canopy closure). All hardwood tree species within the stand would be retained. Grand fir, western hemlock, and/or western red cedar would be under-planted in the heavily thinned and gap areas. The project would be implemented in the dry season; July 15–October 30.

A wetland management zone buffer, 158 feet beyond the extent of the riparian vegetation, would be provided for the wetland within the planning area. Density reduction activities (40% green canopy closure) would be permitted within the outer portion of the management zone, but no closer than 75 feet from the wetlands edge. Cut trees would be directionally felled away from the actual wetland. A no cut buffer would be established 75 feet above the intermittent stream which feeds the wetland.

This action would include approximately 2,500 feet of temporary road construction. New roads and landings, as depicted in Figure 2, would occupy approximately 1.1 acres. Following harvest, the roads and landings would be subsoiled and seeded or planted to native species.

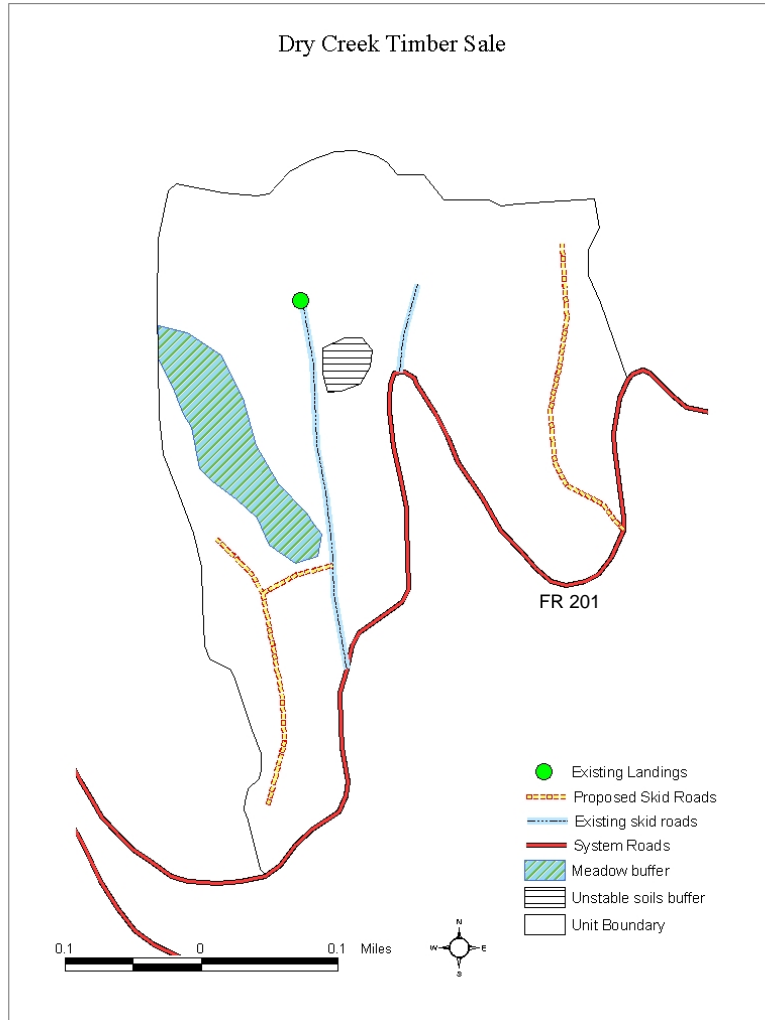


Figure 2. Dry Creek Commercial Thinning area.

DECISION

To meet the objectives of the proposed action, I have decided to: thin the conifers in this 69 acre stand, as described by in the Proposed Action on page 2. The exception being the following project design feature modifications that were made during public involvement (see page 14) and project analysis. This decision includes these design feature changes and the required mitigation detailed below.

This decision authorizes approximately 2,500 feet of temporary road construction. A Knutson-Vandenberg (KV) Collection Plan will be prepared to treat noxious weeds.

The following design feature modifications are included as a part of this decision:

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- Instead of creating two acres into ¼ to ½ acre “gaps”, openings will be created by the temporary roads and landings.
- These openings will be left to grow in an open condition as long as possible to provide for deer/elk forage. Planting will be deferred.
- The proposal for heavily thinning approximately 7 acres of the unit will be done by scattering seven one-acre blocks throughout the unit. A minimum of approximately 70 trees per acre will be retained
- The remainder of the unit will be thinned to approximately 123 trees per acre (19’ x 19’ spacing).
- Include a contract requirement for the purchaser to directional fell to protect the existing remnant snags.
- The existing large woody debris chunks left from the previous entry should be avoided by heavy equipment whenever possible.

The desired future condition following a thinning would enhance several individual characteristics of an LSR: 1) Branch self pruning slows or stops, thus retaining deeper live crowns and additional needle material for maintaining/accelerating growth, 2) Species diversity increases by retaining the minor species within the stand, and 3) Less dense stands provide underplanting opportunities to plant shade tolerant conifers to accelerate the development of secondary tree canopies.

The Dry Creek project will be implemented under the authority of Section 323 of Public Law 108-7, the Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003 (16 U.S.C. 2104 note). The general purpose of Stewardship end result contracting is to achieve land management goals for the National Forest System Lands while meeting local and rural community needs. Monies received from the sale of the Dry Creek sawlogs will be retained and applied to complete previously unfunded stream restoration projects, as described in the Wind River and Dry Creek Channel Restoration Project EA, additional road maintenance activities for Forest Road 201, and reforestation costs of Unit C of the Stray Cat Timber Sale. These projects will be addressed by a separate NEPA decision.

REQUIRED MITIGATION _____

	Mitigation
Aquatics-1	All trees that are within the centerline of the ephemeral bottom will be retained.
Aquatics-2	The district hydrologist will approve erosion control measures prior to project implementation, including review of the contract prior to advertisement and/or project work plan to ensure appropriate mitigation measures are specified. Erosion control measures will be consistent with the NOAA Fisheries Programmatic BO Project Design Criteria and all WDFW MOU provisions.
Aquatics-3	Disposal of excess material will be at designated areas, outside of Riparian Reserves.
Aquatics-4	Service and refueling areas will be designated prior to any activities and located 150 ft. away from stream courses or wet areas (including chainsaws and other hand powered tools). A Forest Service approved spill containment plan that includes requirements for on-site spill containment materials will be in place before operations begin. A spill containment kit will be located where equipment is stored.
Aquatics-5	Hydraulic/oil/fuel leaks will be repaired prior to operating on National Forest System lands. Equipment will be checked daily for leaks and any necessary repairs shall be completed prior to commencing work activities along the stream. Equipment storage locations will be approved by the project administrator. Equipment will not be stored adjacent to or in stream channels when not in use, which will avoid potential effects of vandals, accidents, or natural disasters.
Aquatics-6	Minimize disturbance of existing vegetation in ditches and at stream crossings to the extent necessary to restore the hydrologic function of the road.
Botany-1	Equipment will be scrubbed so it is free of external petroleum-based products and invasive plant seeds or

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	Mitigation
	biomass. Cleaning shall be done before entering National Forest Lands, and when equipment moves from project sites or areas known to be infested into other areas, infested or otherwise. An inspection will be required to ensure that equipment is clean before work can begin.
Botany-2	To prevent the spread of invasive species that currently exist on the FS Road 201 into newly exposed areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove, through hand pulling and/or weed wrenching, all existing noxious weeds and invasive plants within 200 feet of the project area or unit before project commencement. This treatment will occur during the season of project commencement, but before the project begins. • For two years after completion of project, revisit sites where weeds were located before removal to monitor and control new infestation. In addition, monitor newly exposed stream bank areas and control new weed infestations.
Botany-3	Revegetate temporary roads, landings and other areas of heavy disturbance with a native seed mix and application prescription developed by the Gifford Pinchot National Forest for the project site. Guidelines for site preparation shall also be followed (see Gifford Pinchot Native Species Policy, 2000). This information will be provided by the Gifford Pinchot National Forest South Zone Botanist prior to project implementation.
Botany-4	A 75' buffer will be established around an identified <i>Tetraphis geniculata</i> site.
Fuels-1	Activity slash, within the unit, will not be piled, except at the designated landing locations.
Fuels-2	Treetops attached to the last log will be yarded to the designated landings.
Silviculture-1	All hardwoods will be retained.
Silviculture-2	Grand fir, western hemlock, and/or western red cedar will be underplanted in the openings created by temporary roads and landings. Vexar tubing will be installed on the western red cedar to deter animal browsing.
Silviculture-3	To minimize the wounding (bark slough) of residuals and noise disturbance to spotted owls, sale operations will be prohibited from March 1 to July 15.
Soils-1	Ground based equipment will not be allowed on slopes greater than 30 percent.
Soils-2	Log removal on slopes greater than 30 percent will be done with a skyline logging system. A slack pulling carriage will be required for lateral yarding.
Soils-3	Designated skid trails will be identified prior to felling.
Soils-4	Erosion control measures will be kept current as practicable with ongoing operations. During the last two weeks in October, an aquatic specialist will assess erosion control measures weekly for adequacy. If the aquatic specialist determines that erosion control measures are not implemented correctly or the specified erosion control measures are not adequate to control erosion, a modified erosion control plan will be developed and implemented as soon as possible.
Soils-5	If 24-hour rainfall accumulation exceeds 0.5 inches, all activities will cease until precipitation stops and soils drain. The district hydrologist will be responsible for notifying the COR when this rainfall accumulation threshold is reached.
Soils-6	A no cut buffer will be established 75 feet above the identified intermittent tributary which feeds the wetland.
Soils-7	Temporary roads and landings will be sub-soiled and grass seeded after logging operations.
Soils-8	Filter materials or catchments such as silt fences and straw bales may be used prevent sediment transport off-site.
Wildlife-1	Temporary road construction and timber harvest activity would be prohibited from March 1 to June 30.
Wildlife-2	Maintain dispersal habitat (40% canopy closure) in the western and northern portions of the unit would minimize effects to spotted owls near suitable habitat and activity center 818.
Wildlife-3	Protect existing remnant down logs to the extent possible by falling trees away from the logs, and routing skid trails around them.
Wildlife-4	Collect KV to survey existing snags and create snags following harvest to provide an average of 3 per acre when existing snags are considered. Snags would be created by topping or girdling at the crown level. Trees converted to snags should be at least 15 inches dbh.
Wildlife-5	Collect KV to survey existing down woody debris cover and to create logs by felling green trees as needed to meet guidelines in the LSR assessment (LSR Assessment, pp. 5-30).

	Mitigation
Wildlife-6	The wetland within the project area will be buffered 158 feet beyond the extent of the riparian vegetation. Thinning activities (40% green canopy closure) will be permitted within the outer portion of the management zone, but no closer than 75 feet from the wetlands edge.
Wildlife-7	Cut trees will be directionally felled away from the wetland.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment under its compliance with FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2 which “establishes categorical exclusions for limited timber harvest activities of live trees to maintain forest health and improve stand conditions.” Category 12 of this policy allows the “Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction... The proposed action may include incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing [including the] commercial thinning of overstocked stands to achieve the desired stocking level to increase health and vigor.”

Furthermore, the categorical exclusion is appropriate to this proposed action because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the human environment. Specifically, I considered and determined that the potential for adverse effects on the following resource conditions do not exclude the proposed action from implementation.

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 following chart outlines those federally listed species or Region 6 Regional Forester’s Sensitive species and were determined to have the presence or potential presence of habitat within or adjacent to the project area. Letters of Concurrence were obtained from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries for species with an effects determination of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect”.

Table 1. Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive species that are present or potentially present within the project area.

Species	Habitat within or adjacent to project area?	Species documented in the project area?	Effect Determination
ENDANGERED/ THREATENED			
Wildlife			
Northern Spotted Owl	Yes	Yes	May affect, not likely to adversely effect
Critical Habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl	Yes	Yes	No Effect
Gray Wolf	Potential	No	No Effect
Fish			
Lower Columbia River steelhead	Yes	Yes	May affect, not likely to adversely effect
Plants			

Species	Habitat within or adjacent to project area?	Species documented in the project area?	Effect Determination
<i>Howellia aquatilis</i>	Potential	No	No Effect
R6 SENSITIVE SPECIES			
Wildlife			
California Wolverine	Potential	No	No Impact
Puget Oregonian	Yes	No	No Impact
Burrington's Jumping Slug	Yes	No	No Impact
Warty Jumping Slug	Yes	Yes	No Impact
Malone's Jumping Slug	Yes	No	No Impact
Panther Jumping Slug	Yes	No	No Impact
Blue-gray Taildropper	Yes	No	No Impact
Dalles Sideband	Potential	No	No Impact
Plants			
<i>Chaenotheca subrosida</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	May impact individuals or habitat/not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability to individual or species.
<i>Tetraphis geniculata</i>	Yes	Yes	
<i>Albatrellus ellisii</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Cordyceps capitata</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Gomphus kauffmanii</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Gyromitra californica</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Leucogaster citrinus</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Mycena monticola</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Otidea smithii</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Ramaria cyaneigranosa</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Ramaria gelatiniaurantia</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Sarcodon fuscoindicus</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Sowerbyella rhenana</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	
<i>Spathularia flavida</i>	Potential	Not Surveyed	

2. *Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds:*
No floodplains or municipal watersheds present. A 5.6 acre wetland will be protected from thinning activity by a 75 foot buffer.
3. *Congressionally designated areas, inventoried roadless areas, research natural areas:*
No such areas present.
4. *American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites:*
No such areas present.
5. *Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas:*
Past cultural resource surveys of this area indicate that no such areas are present.

EFFECTS ANALYSIS SUMMARIES

In addition to addressing the above categorical exclusion requirements, the following summarizes the project team's analysis reports.

Soils Summary

Soil Productivity

Based on site-specific analysis by a qualified soils scientist, soil impacts would remain less than 20 percent of the project, including existing skid trails. Locally concentrated losses in soil productivity would occur due to additional compaction and displacement. Additional soil damage is expected to be minor with the prescribed logging system design.

Table 2. Predicted effects of proposed skid road construction

	New system roads	New roads and landings construction	Cumulative soil disturbance ¹	Predicted detrimental conditions ²
Acres	0	1.1	3.7	4.8
Percent of unit area	0 %	1.7 %	5.6 %	7.3 %

The percent area to be affected was calculated based on the proposed action. A net loss in soil productivity is predicted in units where landings and temporary road construction remain. The detrimental conditions listed include both the new and existing roads and landings.

About 1.1 acres of new construction would occur within the harvest unit boundary. As stated in the Forest Plan, all permanent roads adjacent to the unit boundaries count toward the detrimental acreage and the amount of area left in a detrimental condition.

In general, the losses predicted are relatively minor in intensity, and vary with time. Short-term losses should be low to moderately damaging to soil quality. This should translate to similar effects on soil productivity.

Table 3. Duration and Intensity of Losses to Soil Quality

Duration	Intensity of Soil Productivity Loss
Short term	Low to moderate
Long term	Insignificant (not measurable) to Low

Long Term Effects – 50 Years: Conditions in disturbed areas would have improved where restored by subsoiling, fertilization and revegetation. Logging slash is an important source of organic matter that supplies sites with nutrients and reduces the potential for surface erosion. Harvesting only the bole of trees does not greatly deplete nutrients, and losses tend to be associated with whole tree harvest and short rotations. Neither whole tree harvest nor short rotations would be employed in this sale.

Soil Organisms

Soil dwelling organisms are not specifically addressed by standards and guidelines at either Forest or Regional levels.

¹ Existing detrimental soil conditions of Dry Creek unit.

² Existing landings and skid trails that are not restored would likely remain in a detrimental condition for the long term. Temporary road and landings can be restored to accelerate their recovery and reduce losses in soil productivity.

Effects in 0 to 5 Years – Locally Concentrated Losses: Logging and site preparation can affect the numbers of species and abundance of soil organisms through soil compaction, lack of vegetation, or lack of plant litter covering the soil surface. The proposed activities may change soil habitats and the food web, and alter soil quality, or the capacity of soil to perform its functions.

Limiting the degree and extent of the effects listed above provides protection for the majority of the populations of soil organisms within the activity areas. These effects are assumed to be temporary and recover naturally, after restoration efforts like subsoiling and seeding/planting. Magnitude, duration and intensity of effects to soil dwelling organisms are likely to be similar to that of soil quality effects listed above (Table 2 and Table 3).

Effects in 10 and 50 Years: Populations of soil dwelling organisms would have essentially recovered. Restoration by subsoiling, fertilization and revegetation, which was intended to accelerate recovery of soil productivity, would improve conditions in disturbed areas. The organisms then can re-colonize the disturbed areas when conditions become favorable.

Mass Wasting

Unstable and potentially unstable slopes are designated as riparian reserves by the Northwest Forest Plan. There would be no change in the rate, size, or number of mass failure events due to the proposed actions. Observed soil instability should be avoided for construction of temporary roads across them.

Wildlife Biological Evaluation Summary

Threatened or Endangered Species

The Dry Creek Thinning proposed action and the likely effects to Threatened and Endangered species are consistent with commercial thinning projects that were analyzed in the Programmatic Biological Assessment for Forest Management (August 2001). Additional consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for terrestrial species is not required. Conservation measures to mitigate project effects on wildlife have been included as Required Mitigation in this decision. A summary of the Biological Evaluation's effects analysis for Federal listed species follows:

Gray Wolf: Although few sightings on the Forest have been confirmed as wolves, it is assumed that single, transient animals moving within large land areas occupy the Mt. Adams District. In the event wolves are confirmed outside of established recovery areas, provisions have been made for the protection of individual animals and for the protections of essential habitats such as denning or rendezvous sites. This protection will be accomplished through timber contract provision CT6.25, Protection of Habitat of Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Species. This provision is part of all timber sale contracts on the Forest. It will allow for protection of any essential habitat components that might be discovered during construction and harvest activities in relation to this timber sale. Therefore, proposed project activities would have no effect on recovery areas or known essential habitats.

Since the project would not increase road density, and have a minor beneficial effect on ungulate prey habitat, and given the wolf's large home range and likelihood of a wolf being in the vicinity of the project, the proposed project would have no effect on gray wolf.

California Wolverine: The effect to wolverines would be essentially the same as described for gray wolf. Since the project would not increase road density, and have a minor beneficial effect on ungulate prey habitat, and given the wolverine's large home range and likelihood of a wolverine being in the vicinity of the project, the proposed project would have no impact on wolverine.

Northern Spotted Owl and Spotted Owl Habitat: Approximately 80 percent of the Dry Creek sub-watershed functions at least as dispersal habitat. The stand to be treated contains a fairly high canopy closure, however there are no large snags, the understory is poorly developed, and down woody debris consists mainly of soft logs that are remnants of the last timber harvest. It is likely that owls use the stand to access foraging areas within their home range; however, the stand probably supports few prey animals for spotted owls.

The western boundary of the Dry Creek thinning unit is adjacent to a stand that is classified as nesting habitat. The suitable habitat patch extends north and south of the unit. An historic spotted owl activity center (#818) is located about 220 yards north of the Dry Creek unit within this nesting habitat stand. The first documented spotted owl detection was made at that site in 1988, and pair status was documented in 1989. Two spotted owl detections of unknown sex were made in 1994 and a male and another unknown spotted owl were detected in 1995. The site was called opportunistically in 2002 during surveys for the Wind River Highway realignment project and no response was heard.

Spotted owl surveys have not been done for this project, and it is unknown if this activity center is active. See Figure 3 for a map of suitable spotted owl habitat in the vicinity of the Dry Creek Unit.

The proposed thinning project would not reduce the amount of suitable nesting, roosting or foraging habitat. Approximately 7 acres within the unit would no longer meet the definition of dispersal habitat after thinning. These are the areas that would be thinned to below 40% canopy closure. The remainder of the stand would still meet the requirement for dispersal habitat after thinning.

The thinning would have short-term effects on dispersal habitat in the stand, and as such, the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect spotted owls. In the long-term, conditions would be moving toward desired future conditions for stands in Late-Successional Reserves. Development of large trees with deep crowns, multiple canopy layers, and structural diversity would be accelerated.

Despite the removal of 7 acres of dispersal habitat, CHU WA-41 would continue to provide demographic support through large blocks of existing NRF habitat. Distribution of habitat within CHU WA-41 indicates that the ability of owls to disperse within the CHU would not be significantly altered by the proposed action. There would be no effect to Critical Habitat.

Spotted Owl Habitat

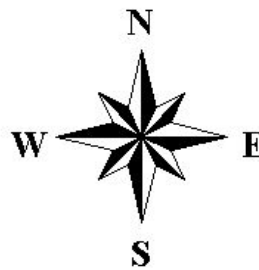


Figure 3. Northern spotted owl habitat in the vicinity of the Dry Creek Commercial Thinning project.

Neotropical Migratory Birds

The proposed thinning would open the stand enough to encourage growth of understory deciduous shrubs such as vine maple. The hardwood trees would be retained in the stand, maintaining habitat diversity. Opening the mid-story and increasing the deciduous understory and forest floor complexity would improve habitat conditions for Hammond's flycatcher, Wilson's warbler and winter wren. In the long-term, the treatment would accelerate development of habitat for Vaux's swift, red crossbill, pileated woodpecker, and varied thrush. The proposed action would treat habitat that is not limited in the watershed and improve conditions in the short-term by adding complexity and structural diversity. In addition, the seasonal restriction to minimize damage to residual trees (March 1 to July 15) would minimize disturbance during the majority of the nesting season. For these reasons, the project would not result in significant effects to neotropical migrant bird populations.

Fisheries Biological Evaluation Summary

Threatened or Endangered Species

Steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are the only listed fish species found within the Upper Wind River and Dry Creek watersheds. Two species of naturally occurring Pacific salmon exist in the lower three miles of the Wind River near the confluence with the Columbia River: Lower Columbia River (LCR) Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and LCR coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*). Cutthroat trout (*O. clarki clarki*) are also found in the Lower Wind River. Both species and critical habitat are 19 river miles downstream of the project area.

The proposed activity will cause some ground disturbance, vegetation disturbance, and habitat disturbance through short-term sediment delivery. There will be no work in the riparian areas and therefore stream shade or stream temperature will not be altered, nor is the project expected to add detectable amounts sediment to the adjacent stream course near the project area. The effects of these disturbances will be temporary and mitigated to the degree possible, and will not jeopardize the existence of threatened/endangered/sensitive fish species. Due to the proximity of the commercial thin from stream courses that inhabit listed anadromous fish species this project has been determined to have **no effect** on bull trout since they do not inhabit the watershed. In addition, there will be **no effect** on LCR Chinook and coho because they exist 19 river miles below the project area and no sediment generated from the project will be transported to this area. Although mitigation measures and project design criteria are expected to prevent measurable amounts of sediment from entering Dry Creek or the Wind River where steelhead exist, there is still the potential to deliver fine sediment into threatened steelhead habitat. Therefore it is determined that this project **may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect** LCR Steelhead. Therefore, informal consultation with NOAA Fisheries is required.

Essential Fish Habitat is defined in the Act as "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity." Essential Fish Habitat includes all freshwater streams accessible to anadromous fish, marine waters, and intertidal habitats. Near the Dry Creek Commercial Thin Project area, this would include the lower portions of Dry Creek and the mainstem of the Wind River. The Dry Creek Commercial Thinning project is not likely to adversely affect Essential Fish Habitat for LCR coho or Chinook salmon for the following reasons: 1) there is no Essential Fish Habitat in the 69-acre project planning area, 2) there are no roads proposed in areas of EFH, 3) there is only minor road maintenance (i.e., patching of potholes) near EFH, 4) there are no harvest units within or adjacent to EFH, 5) there will be no commercial thinning within Riparian Reserves and therefore will not reduce stream shade, potential LWM or riparian function. Due to the required mitigation measures, the project actions are not expected to generate measurable amounts of sediment into the stream and therefore this project will have **no effect** to EFH and therefore no consultation is required.

Botany Biological Evaluation Summary

Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed Species

No Federally listed Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed species were known to occur in the area, and none were found during surveys in the area. As such, this project produces *no effects* to Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed species.

Sensitive Species

Tetraphis geniculata, a moss that dwells on large well-rotted logs and stumps on the forest floor was found in several locations in and around the wetland and valley floor. This species has recently been moved from the Survey and Manage list onto the Sensitive species list. Dry Creek Timber Sale *may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species.*

Potential Impacts to Unsurveyable Sensitive Species

There were 12 fungi and one lichen species that are considered to be unsurveyable, but were thought to have some potential to occur in the project area base on their range and habitat descriptions. None of these species were known in the area, or its surrounding vicinity. Habitat in the project area could be suitable, and possibly occupied, although the likelihood of their presence in the area was considered remote. The determination of impacts for all of these species was “may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species.

Silvicultural Summary

The proposed silvicultural treatment methods within the proposed stand meets all the requirements, conditions, and constraints for vegetation manipulation as specified in title 36 CFR 219.27 (b) and Appendix F of the Forest Plan. In addition, the proposed treatment is in compliance with the criteria outlined in Chapter 5 of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (1997). The project is exempt from the requirements of the Mediated Agreement and the 1988 Record of Decision for Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation because the project is limited to thinning.

Fuels Summary

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Formal public involvement in the Dry Creek project began with a public outreach effort called *scoping* which endeavors to garner substantive comments and concerns from entities outside of the Forest Service to help the agency’s interdisciplinary team better understand stakeholder issues. On March 12, 2004 a project proposal letter was provided to 51 stakeholders including private citizens, environmental groups, industry representatives, and government agencies. To date five response letters have been received. Between May 21 and 25 June 2004, five field trips to the Dry Creek project area were conducted for all interested stakeholders including representatives from government, industry, and environmental groups. Together, responses from the public and site field trips helped the interdisciplinary team to modify the project’s design.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAW _____

I find that this decision is consistent with the as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and guidelines for the *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan. The proposed action is also based on the recommendations of the 1997 Gifford Pinchot National Forest Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (pp. 5-6 – 5-10). I find that there will be no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources from implementation of this project.

I find that this action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. For Threatened and Endangered terrestrial species, this action and the likely effects to species and their habitat are consistent with commercial thinning projects that were analyzed in the Programmatic Biological Assessment for Forest Management (August 2001). Additional consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for terrestrial species is not required. For Threatened and Endangered aquatic species, it is determined that this project *may effect but is not likely to adversely affect* Lower Columbia River steelhead, therefore informal consultation with NOAA Fisheries is required. This project *may impact individuals or habitat/not likely contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability to individual or species* for 14 plant species that are listed on the R6 Regional Forester’s sensitive species list. No consultation is required.

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 EFH 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 BMP’s in conformance with the CWA and Federal guidance and management direction.

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

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

IMPLEMENTATION DATE _____

This project may be implemented immediately.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES _____

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

CONTACT INFORMATION _____

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

Bruce Holmson
Dry Creek Project Leader
Mt. Adams Ranger District
2455 Hwy 141

Decision Memo: Dry Creek Thinning

Trout Lake, WA 98650
bholmson@fs.fed.us
509-395-3390

/s/ *Nancy Ryke*

9/30/2004

Nancy Ryke
District Ranger

Date

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