

Appendix A: Mowich Huckleberry Thinning Comments and Forest Service Responses

The Mowich Huckleberry Thinning proposal was issued for a formal 30-day public comment period beginning on June 5, 2006. Substantive comments were received from two sources:

- Conservation Northwest (signed by Derick Churchill) – CNW
- Gifford Pinchot Task Force (signed by Ryan Hunter) – GPTF

Following is a summary of the comments and Forest Service Responses.

	Comment	Forest Service Response
CNW-1	<p><i>Appropriateness and scientific basis for 28’ x 28’ thinning prescription. Prescription approaches for variable retention harvesting should be used instead of DxD thinning methods. Much has been learned from the DEMO experiment on variable retention harvesting that could be applied here</i></p>	<p>The 60 residual trees per acre left on 47 acres was designed to provide optimum light levels to enhance huckleberry growth and berry production. Shade trial studies conducted by Danny L. Barney, Ph.D., University of Idaho, suggest that Mountain Huckleberry best performs under about 30% shade. The thinning prescription is intended to mimic these conditions.</p> <p>The unit prescription will also mimic variable retention thinning (VRT). The 47 acres of upland prescription will contain approximately 8 1-acre retention islands to protect known survey and manage sites. Eleven acres of riparian reserves will be treated with a lighter thinning (110 residual trees/acre) and 5 acres of riparian reserves will be retained and not entered for thinning. Gaps were not utilized in the prescription due to the ridge location of the unit and the concern about potential blowdown from strong wind events. The Road 4100 and 4100-405 prisms, within the unit represent “gap” acreage.</p>

	<i>First, large patch cuts or openings could be placed around existing huckleberry plants. Some dominant or co-dominant trees should be left within the patches to provide structure, or to become snags or CWD if the wind gets them.</i>	Large patch openings are not recommended for this unit due to its location along a ridge top and the concern about potential blowdown from strong wind events.
	<i>Second, for experimental purposes, heavier dispersed retention (the equivalent of heavy thinning) could be used in some areas where a mix of huckleberries and other shrubs exist.</i>	The proposed retention of 60 trees per acre on the majority of the unit would meet the definition of heavy thinning.
	<i>Third, areas with vine maple and other dominant shrubs could left in uncut retention patches (large skips), along with riparian reserves.</i>	There are several of these areas left in the no-thin portions of the riparian reserves and associated with the buffers for Malone's jumping slug.
	<i>Some clumps could be under-burned to create greater complexity while others could have a hand line or dozer line around them to keep the understories from burning.</i>	The prescription recommends that only 43 acres of the unit be underburned, while other areas and understories would be retained, such as in the riparian reserves.
	<i>Based on the results of DEMO, higher retention is better for most components of biodiversity (Aubry et al. 2004). Thus 35-40% retention seems reasonable and is in line with the basal area removal of the current 28'x28' DxD approach.</i>	Agree.
GPTF-1	<i>Will the reconstruction of the 41 road involve the placement of new culverts? What will the closing of this portion of the 41 road entail?</i>	New culverts will be installed. See Design Features 10 and 11 for details about road closure and stabilization after project activities.
	<i>Due to the apparent drainage problems on the road, the Task Force recommends that the Forest Service not just close this portion of the 41 road but fully decommission it with re-contouring the road to a more natural slope. The 405 spur road also has drainage problems and the Task Force recommends that the project address these drainage problems as well.</i>	Temporary roads will be closed and scarified/stabilized) when the project is completed (see Design Features 10 and 11). Road 4100 will serve as the main access trail the site for monitoring or recreational use. It will not be fully decommissioned.

GPTF-2	<p><i>The project calls for a small dozer fire-line to be constructed around the perimeter of the project units. How large will this dozer fire-line be? What impact will the fire-line have on soils and native vegetation? Will it be just inside or just outside the unit boundaries? Will the dozer fire-line in anyway impact mature and old growth stands to the south of Unit A or the habitat that they may provide to sensitive species?</i></p>	<p>The dozer line will be constructed by a mechanical excavator or bulldozer. The fireline will need to be to mineral soil, 3 to 5 feet in width, and not to an entire full blade width. Native vegetation will be temporarily removed. The fireline will mostly follow the unit perimeter, but will deviate to utilize topographic features to achieve a more secure holding line. No old growth stands will be impacted.</p>
GPTF-3	<p><i>What is the size of the riparian buffers in units B & C? The Task Force recommends that this riparian buffer in particular be increased (to one average site potential tree from adjacent headwater stream) and that the other buffers be checked to ensure an appropriate distance.</i></p>	<p>The total riparian width for the riparian buffers in units B and C is 156 feet (one-site potential tree)</p>
GPTF-4	<p><i>What effort will the Forest Service make to control the spread of noxious weed species as part of this project? The Task Force recommends that the Forest Service ensure that all vehicles be washed prior to entering the project area and that noxious weed mitigation work be conducted before, during, and after project activity. Such work should be funded as part of the project rather than using unreliable KV funds.</i></p>	<p>Both the timber sale contract and a request for KV funding will be used for noxious weed prevention and control. See Design Features 21 through 26.</p>
GPTF-5	<p><i>The proposed project is accessible via the 43 and 41 roads, both of which are in poor condition. One of the goals of the project is to increase huckleberry production for berry pickers, which will inevitably increase recreational use of the area. How does the Forest Service intend to address the problems that may arise from increased recreational use of roads in such poor condition?</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, we are curious to know why the Forest Service chose this location for its project, rather than a location, such as the berry fields area, that sees greater use by berry pickers.</i></p>	<p>The Mowich area along the ridge and on either side of Road 4100 is already a popular location for huckleberry harvesters.</p> <p>The location for this trial was selected as representative of a fire-disturbed ecosystem where huckleberries once thrived, but are declining due to canopy closure and competition. This project is intended to be a demonstration of treatments which, if successful, can be applied over a broader landscape.</p> <p>This site would remain accessible to berry pickers who may hike in following re-closure of Road 4100.</p>

GPTF-6	<i>Finally, while the project information provided to the public mentioned a thinning prescription achieving an approximate spacing of 28 feet by 28 feet, it did not mention how this would be accomplished. Will the project utilize a designation by description approach, with an emphasis on thinning from below?</i>	The project will utilize a designation by description. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest always designs thinning prescriptions to thin out the smaller trees and retain the larger diameter size class.
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