

Decision Memo

Mount St. Helens Stand Improvement Activities

SOPA Number: 16223

**USDA Forest Service
Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument,
Gifford Pinchot National Forest
Skamania County, Washington**

PURPOSE OF and NEED FOR ACTION

This action would control stand density by thinning fifteen- to twenty-year old plantations within the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (outside of the legislated Monument). This action also would prune the lower limbs from older noble fir trees and manually fertilize selected pruned stands.

The purpose of this action is to optimize growth of young stands and to provide a commercial product (boughs). Stands resulting from plantations tend to be too dense for optimum growth. Inter-tree competition for light and moisture can increase susceptibility to disease and insects. There is a need to thin and/or prune and fertilize these stands to improve vigor of the remaining trees.

Young stands within both matrix and Late-Successional Reserve allocations are proposed to be treated. There is a need to improve growth within the matrix allocation to meet objectives for stand health and a sustainable supply of forest products. There is a need to improve growth within the Late-Successional Reserve to be able to accelerate the development of late-successional stand characteristics.

This action would meet the additional objectives of enhancing wildlife habitat, diversifying species composition in plantations, restoring function within riparian zones, and managing viewsheds.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would manually thin saplings within plantations over 1,006 acres over the next three years on the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (MSHNVN). This would include 573 acres in matrix lands and 433 acres in late successional reserve areas (LSR) within the following watersheds:

Upper Lewis River; Muddy River, Swift Reservoir Lewis River, and Yale Reservoir Lewis River

Refer to Attachment A for a listing of plantations to be thinned.

Plantations to be thinned would primarily be fifteen to twenty years old, largely Douglas-fir and average 300 to 1,000 or more trees per acre. Thinning would reduce the overstocked condition in selected plantations to 170 to 300 trees per acre resulting in residual spacing of twelve to sixteen feet between saplings.

Slash resulting from thinning would remain untreated because of low fire potential. Where warranted, slash may be pulled back from heavily traveled roads to reduce the risk of human-caused ignition. For aesthetic and fire potential reasons slash would typically be managed along trail corridors.

Three hundred and sixty-one acres of stands of noble fir averaging between twenty and thirty feet in height have been identified for pruning (refer to Attachment B). Individual trees would be manually pruned from the lower half of the bole of the tree. Branched would be bundled and removed for commercial sale. Where feasible, a helicopter would be used to transport bundles of boughs from the site.

Selected stands that had been pruned would be manually fertilized during the spring or autumn. Pelletized forestry grade urea (46-0-0) would be broadcast by hand under the drip line of trees at a rate of approximately one to two pounds per tree resulting in an application of approximately 300 to 450 pounds per acre. Helicopters may be used to assist with transport of fertilizer and materials to remote sites.

Refer to Figure 1 for location of plantations to be thinned and stands to be pruned under this action.

FOREST PLAN DIRECTION

The *Gifford Pinchot 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, amended 2004) provides management direction for activities on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Plantations to be thinned and the stands that will be pruned are located within different Management Categories:

Pre-commercial thinning:

Late-Successional Reserve - General Late-Successional Reserve (LS)
Visual Emphasis (VL)
Scenic River (NA)

Matrix - General Forest (TS)
Visual Emphasis (VM)

Pruning:

Late-Successional Reserve - General Late-Successional Reserve (LS)
Visual Emphasis (VL)

Matrix - General Forest (TS)
Visual Emphasis (VM)

Both pre-commercial thinning and pruning are activities that would be permitted under the Visual Quality Objective of “Retention”, thus these activities are consistent with the Management Areas indicated above.

FINDINGS

These actions are not ground-disturbing, thus there would be no effect to aquatic resources from the proposed action, including water quality or Threatened fish species or their Designated Critical Habitat.

The proposed action is covered by the Programmatic Biological Assessment for Threatened and Endangered species. A Project Consistency Form was completed in March 2006 (available in project file). The proposed *action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* northern spotted owls. There would be no effect to other Threatened or Endangered wildlife species.

Based on the prefield review, it was determined that the stand improvement activities associated with this project *May Impact Individuals Or Habitat, But Will Not Likely Contribute To A Trend Towards Federal Listing Or Cause A Loss Of Viability To the Population or Species* for all Regional Forester’s Sensitive plant species.

The proposed action takes place in habitat that is not suitable for Survey and Manage wildlife species and there are no known sites, thus there would be no effect to these species.

There would be no effect to cultural or historic resources from the proposed action.

There would be no burning associated with the proposed action, thus there would be no effect to air quality.

MITIGATION AND DESIGN CRITERIA

To prevent the introduction of noxious weeds into the project area, all heavy equipment, or other off- road equipment used in the project is to be cleaned to remove soil, seeds, vegetative matter or other debris that could contain seeds. Cleaning should be done before entering National Forest Lands, and when equipment moves from or between project sites or areas known to be infested into other areas, infested or otherwise. Cleaning of the equipment may include pressure washing. An inspection will be required to ensure that equipment is clean before work can begin. (Equipment cleaning clause Wo-C6.35).

If soil disturbance occurs, revegetate with site appropriate, locally collected native seed or native plants; when these are not available, use noninvasive and nonpersistent non-native species. When seed is used it should be either certified noxious weed free or from Forest Service native seed supplies.

Thinning prescriptions will be designed in such a way as to protect and maintain a significant portion of hardwood species and communities or incorporate gaps that would enhance the development of hardwood, shrubland, and herbaceous communities within the treatment stands.

DECISION

I have decided to implement the proposed action to thin selected plantations, prune and fertilize young stands as described above. This decision requires the implementation of all mitigation measures and design criteria that are included in this document.

Young stand thinning, pruning, and fertilization are activities fall within a category of actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service which normally do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. This category of actions is identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2, Category 6 as:

Timber stand and/or wildlife improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.

A categorical exclusion is appropriate since there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. I considered the potential to affect federally listed species or their designated critical habitat, the potential for disturbance to culturally significant sites, and effects to soil, water, and air quality. I find that the effect of this action will not result in individually or cumulatively significant impacts.

I find that this action meets my primary objective for improving stand condition and has the potential to achieve my secondary objectives for enhancing wildlife habitat, diversifying species composition in plantations, restoring function within riparian zones, and managing viewsheds.

SCOPING

The proposed action was circulated to interdisciplinary team members for internal review. The proposal was published in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest *Schedule of Proposed Actions* (SOPA) beginning in April 2006. Similar proposed actions at

MSHNVN and other districts have not resulted in public comment. Tribes have been notified of this proposed action by written correspondence.

FINDINGS REQUIRED by NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT and OTHER LAWS

As required by the National Forest Management Act, this decision is consistent with 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, amended 2004). I find that implementation of this project is consistent with standards and guidelines for this allocation and will result in conditions that are closer to the desired future condition. The project was designed in conformance with Forest Plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for activities in Management Areas identified on pages 2 and 3 of this document.

I find that this action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. There will be no effects to federally listed wildlife species, fish species,

I find that this action is consistent with the Forest Service policy concerning Sensitive species or species that are identified as “Survey and Manage” species in the Northwest Forest Plan (2001, as amended by annual species reviews, 2001–2005).

I find that this decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Federal Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. There are no timing restrictions for this action.

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 or represents 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 beginning summer of 2006.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Cynthia Henschell by phone: (509) 395-3411 or email: chenschell@fs.fed.us.

/s/ **Tom Mulder**

6/14/2006

TOM MULDER
Monument Manager

Date

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Attachment A: Plantations to be Thinned — 2006 MSHNVM.

Unit Name	TWP (N)	RNG (E)	SEC	Acres	NFP AL	MAC
Horn 5	7	4	36	22	M	
Horn 2	7	5	6	64	M	
Lama 5	7	5	6	15	M	
N73 2	7	7	29	38	M	
Lone 1	7	8	29	59	M	
Lone 4	7	8	30	36	M	
Lone 5	7	8	32	4	M	
Snap 1	7	8	32	7	M	
Butte 3	7	9	29, 30	41	M	
Jackpine Salvage	8	6	30	12	M	
Quill Salvage 14	8	6	30	24	M	
Spencer 1	8	7	2	36	LSR	
Ursus 2	8	7	2	19	LSR	
Ursus 5	8	7	3	9	LSR	
Overwood 4	8	7	9	44	LSR	
Delivery Salvage 4	8	7	10	4	LSR	
Ursus 4	8	7	10	9	LSR	
MW Salvage II 18	8	7	11	37	LSR	
TD Salvage 4	8	7	11	8	LSR	
Foreground 6	8	7	18	12	LSR	
Alec 6	8	7.5	1	34	LSR	
Alec 8	8	7.5	12	25	LSR	
Quartz Butte 5	8	8	9	8	LSR	
Side 5	8	8	14, 23	32	M	
Tilly 3	8	8	16	20	LSR	
Licum 7	8	8	28	14	M	
Gold 10	8	9	2	5	M	
Gold 7	8	9	2	2	M	
Pin 15	8	9	4	3	M	
Gold 2	8	9	10	7	M	
Gold 3	8	9	10	6	M	
Twin 1	8	9	10	29	M	
Gold 11	8	9	11	26	M	
Twin Falls 4	8	9	11	9	M	
Twin Falls B	8	9	11	6	M	
Cricket 4	8	9	16	36	M	
Cricket 1	8	9	21	15	M	
Strip 4	9	7	2, 35	17	LSR	
Hope 8	9	7	9	32	LSR	
Top Salvage 4	9	7	21	1	LSR	
Edge 3	9	7	29	36	LSR	
Strip Salvage SSTS 1	9	7	34	28	LSR	
MW Salvage II 17	9	7	35	20	LSR	
Alec Creek 3	9	7	36	34	LSR	
Twin Falls 3	9	8	11	12	M	
Stew 8	9	9	28	24	M	
Stew 5	9	9	28, 33	25	M	

Attachment B: Stands to be Pruned — 2006 MSHNVM.

Unit Name	TWP (N)	RNG (E)	SEC	Acres	NFP AL	MAC
Zephyr Salvage 9	6	8	7	11	LSR	
Zephyr Salvage 10	6	8	7, 8, 17	37	LSR	
Tom Fall 3	6	8	18	3	LSR	
Tomahawk 3	6	8	18	4	LSR	
Tomahawk 6	6	8	18	5	LSR	
Tom Fall 4	6	8	19	6	LSR	
Delivery Salvage 3	8	7	10	7	M	
Tooth Salvage SSTS 3	8	7	10	5	M	
Contraction 3	8	7	10, 11	19	M	
Contraction 5	8	7	11, 14	31	M	
Contraction EP	8	7	15	4	M	
Delivery Salvage 1	8	7	15	5	M	
Ursus 7	8	7	15	6	M	
Alec 8	8	7.5	12	25	M	
Way 9	9	6	10, 15	23	LSR	
Way 5	9	6	23	13	LSR	
Snyder Meadow 3	9	7	15	46	M	
Snyder Meadow 6	9	7	15, 22	36	M	
Summit 7	9	9	22, 23	75	LSR	

Figure 1.

