



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Olympic
National
Forest

Hood Canal Ranger District
P.O. Box 280
Quilcene, WA 98376

File Code: 1950

Date: 1/29/07

Dear Interested Party,

The Olympic National Forest is proposing to commercially thin 69 acres of second growth forest to enhance structural diversity and promote the development of old growth characteristics to achieve desired conditions identified by the Forest Plan. This proposal adds an additional 31 acres that were not included in the original scoping letter dated March 7, 2006. This action would occur in the Pine Creek drainage and the Lebar Creek drainage within the South Fork Skokomish Watershed, in Mason County. The 69 acres to be thinned would be selected from a 39 acre stand in the Pine Creek drainage and an 80 acre stand in the Lebar Creek drainage (see attached map). The legal location of the proposed stands for thinning is T23N, R6W, Sections 34-35 and T22N, R5W, Sections 4-5. This commercial thinning is part of the proposed Pine Creek Stewardship Project, in which the receipts from the commercial thinning would be used to fund the decommissioning and conversion to trail of the last 0.6 miles of Forest Service Road 2361000. The environmental analysis and decision to decommission and convert this portion of road to trail was completed on February 3, 2006.

Forest Service personnel are preparing to conduct an environmental review for the proposed thinning as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). It is expected that this project will fall within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and has no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of the categorical exclusions. (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31).

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in the NEPA analysis during our 30-day public notice and comment period. Comments in support or in opposition are welcome. In particular, if you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or feel you have issues (points of dispute, debate, or disagreement) regarding potential effects of this proposed action, please send those issues in writing to the project leader (Bruce Huntley, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512), or e-mail: comments-pacificnorthwest-olympic-hoodcanal@fs.fed.us.

Comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of a notice in the Peninsula Daily News. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. Those who provide timely and substantive comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

All comments received will become part of the public record and copies of comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, may be released for public inspection. Requests by individual respondents to have their home addresses withheld from the public record will be honored to the extent allowable by law. Such requests to withhold names and/or



addresses must be stated prominently at the beginning of the comments. Anonymous comments will not be considered. Submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

This comment period is being provided pursuant to the September 16, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of this action is to:

- Increase structural diversity of forest stands, develop a multi-layered canopy, and enhance growth and coverage of herbaceous plants on the forest floor; and
- Generate revenue via commercial thinning to fund the Forest Service Road 2361000 decommissioning and conversion to trail.

The Northwest Forest Plan-designated land allocations within the project area are Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) and Riparian Reserve. The objective of LSR lands is to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems. Riparian Reserves, overlaying other Northwest Forest Plan land allocations, are intended to protect the health of the riparian and aquatic system.

Thus, there is a need for forest stands in the project area to be healthy and structurally diverse. The majority of the stands within the proposed project units are single-storied, second-growth stands that are experiencing a slowing of growth due to overcrowding. The current stand condition is the result of past tree planting and natural reseedling following past logging activities and does not provide adequate habitat for old-growth dependent species. If no action is taken, this overstocked condition would result in stands with reduced vigor, increased mortality, and reduced diversity. If no action is taken in Riparian Reserves, stands would have reduced capability to produce the size and quantity of large woody debris sufficient to sustain physical complexity and stability of the Riparian Reserves and associated streams.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Hood Canal Ranger District of the Olympic National Forest proposes to apply a “thinning from below” silvicultural treatment by removing the suppressed, intermediate and some codominant trees (i.e., the smaller trees). The stands would be thinned to approximately 110 trees per acre and favor retention of less common species in order to increase diversity. The stands being considered are 40-50 years old in Late Successional Reserve (LSR). The reduction in trees per acre would result in increased diameter growth and crown expansion by the remaining trees, while still leaving options for future stand management, such as snag and coarse woody debris creation. The proposed thinning would accelerate development of the stands to more quickly become fully functioning late successional/old growth forest. The thinning would also open the stands to allow more light to reach the forest floor, promoting the natural regeneration of trees, shrubs and forbs and increasing forage for deer and elk.

Thinning in Riparian Reserves within the proposed units would provide more space for the remaining trees to accelerate diameter growth. The objective is to provide large diameter coniferous trees adjacent to streams to serve as future recruitment for large organic debris. Additionally, prescriptions would be adjusted for unstable or potentially unstable areas within Riparian Reserves.

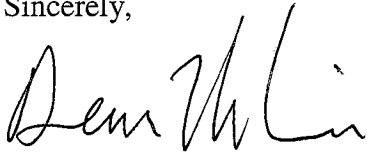
There would be no new, reconstructed, or temporary roads built under the proposed action. The proposed thinning units would be yarded utilizing one or both of the following methods:

1. skyline yarded, incorporating the use of intermediate supports to maintain log suspension and reduce impacts to forest soils
2. cut-to-length and yarded to existing roads using a forwarder, carrying logs above the ground, thereby, reducing impact to forest soils.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The responsible official (District Ranger) will decide what level of thinning is appropriate in the project area and what management requirements and mitigation measures are included in the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Yoshina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

DEAN YOSHINA
District Ranger

cc: Bruce Huntley

Location of proposed forest commercial thinning area.

