

**File Code:** 1950-1

**Date:** February 12, 2007

Dear Interested Party,

The Forest Service is in the process of planning and conducting environmental analysis on the West Fork Humptulips Thinning project, previously referred to as the Humptulips Vegetation Management Project. The project proposes silvicultural treatments that speed the development of late-successional forest conditions in second-growth stands less than 80 years old that are located primarily in the West Fork Humptulips 6<sup>th</sup> field subwatershed with some outlying stands in the Cook Creek and Middle Quinault River subwatersheds. The legal location of the project is: T21N, R9W, Sections 1-6; T22N, R9W, Sections 1-3, 8-35; T22N, R10W, Sections 35-36; T22N, R8W, Section 6; and T23N, R9W, Sections 35-36.

### **YOUR INVOLVEMENT**

The purpose of this letter is to invite your participation in the NEPA analysis during our public scoping process. 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 (Yewah Lau, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512), or e-mail: [comments-pacificnorthwest-olympic-pacific@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-olympic-pacific@fs.fed.us) by March 12, 2007. We will use any significant issues that are identified to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action. Those who respond to this scoping will be notified when the Environmental Assessment for this project is available for a thirty day review and public comment period. If you have no comments at this time, but would like to remain involved, please let us know.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Northwest Forest Plan-designated land allocations within the project area are primarily 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, which overlay all other land allocations, are intended to protect the health of the riparian and aquatic system.

According to the East/West Fork Humptulips Watershed Analysis, historic vegetation had been highly stable and in an old-growth state most of the time. Timber harvest activities, beginning in the late 1940's, converted almost 40 percent of what is now the Quinault South Late Successional Reserve into young, even-aged stands across the watershed (USDA 1996, pg. II-8). Changes in forest structure due to timber harvest have fragmented the landscape with patches of 60-100 acre dense, homogeneous stands that exhibit little structural or species diversity. Harvest and post-harvest activities also reduced the amount of coarse woody debris and snags within harvest units to near zero levels, far below the natural condition. In addition to impacts from past timber harvesting, associated road building has also impacted the watershed.



## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION**

Given the importance of this area for old-growth dependent and aquatic species and the objective of protecting and accelerating the development of late-successional characteristics in Late Successional Reserves, there is a need for improving conditions in the West Fork Humptulips 6<sup>th</sup> field watershed and adjacent areas. Thus, the purpose of this project is to improve watershed conditions by 1) using silvicultural treatments that speed the development of late-successional forest conditions in 35 to 80 year old second-growth stands in the West Fork Humptulips watershed and adjacent areas, 2) improving existing roads and decommissioning unclassified, abandoned roads that are used for project implementation, and 3) using funds generated from the project to support additional watershed improvement activities.


## **PROPOSED ACTION**

Approximately 8,000 gross acres of plantations are currently being considered for commercial thinning. The enclosed map shows units that are initially being considered for thinning. 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), while favoring the retention of less common species in order to increase diversity. The reduction in tree density 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 promote the development of habitat characteristics that are found in fully functioning late successional/old growth forest. Thinning in Riparian Reserves within the proposed units would provide more growing space for the remaining trees to accelerate diameter growth. The objective is to provide large diameter conifer trees adjacent to the stream to serve as future recruitment for large organic debris.

Project design criteria are being considered and developed to reduce negative effects to resources. Riparian no-harvest buffers would be delineated to ensure that the stream banks remain intact and stable. Additionally, the thinning prescription would be adjusted for unstable or potentially unstable areas. As a result the number of acres that are included for commercial thinning under any alternative may be substantially less than the current gross acreage currently being considered. Where possible, open system roads and old, abandoned road grades would be used for access, as well as the consideration of helicopter yarding, to reduce the need for new temporary road construction. Abandoned and new temporary roads used during project implementation would be decommissioned after use.

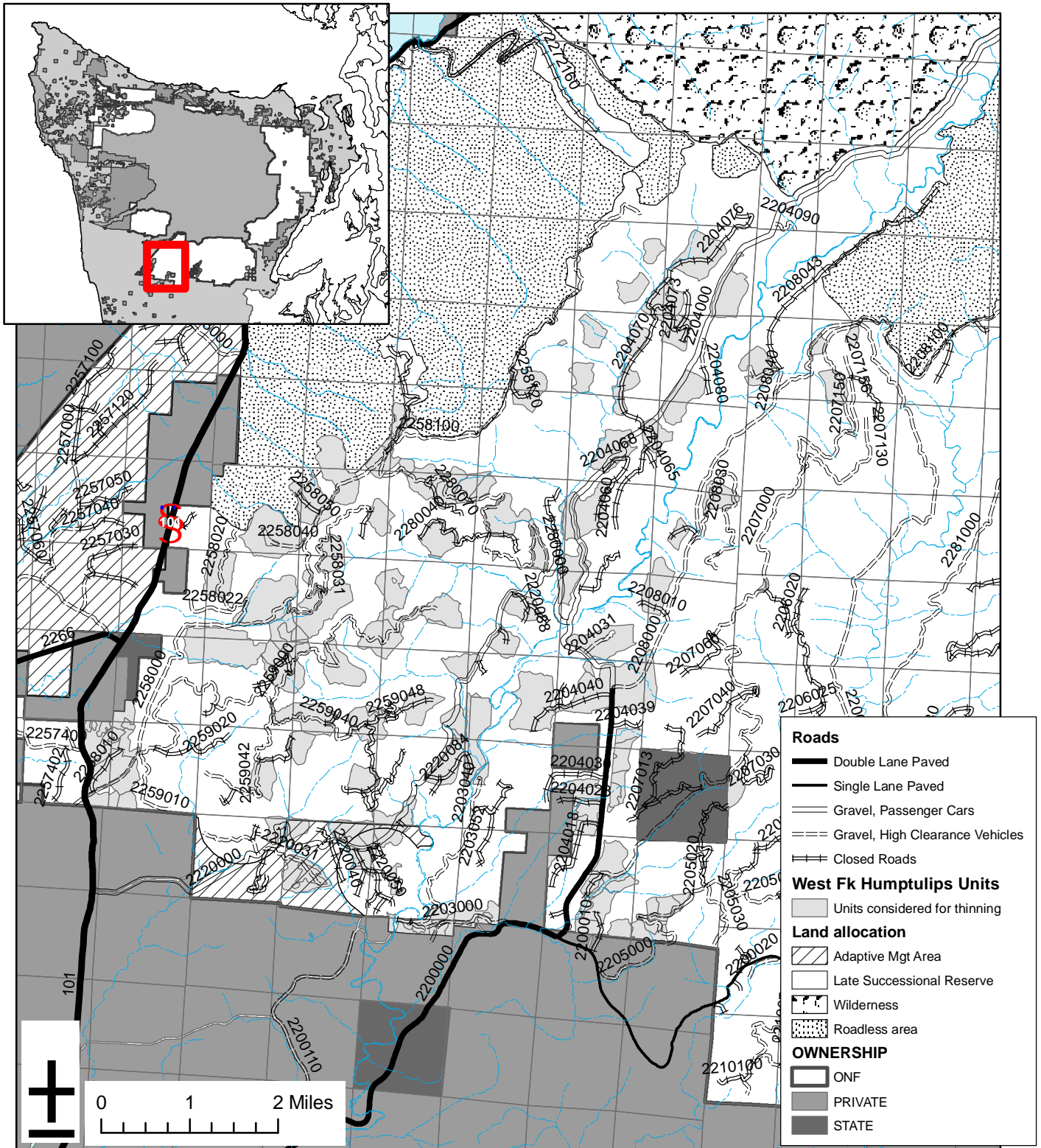
At a minimum, two alternatives will be developed; a no action alternative and an alternative to implement variable density thinning as a vegetation management tool. Other alternatives will be developed based on issues and concerns raised during tribal consultation, public scoping, and interdisciplinary team discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dale Hom', written in a cursive style.

DALE HOM  
Forest Supervisor

# Olympic National Forest -- West Humptulips Thinning Preliminary Proposal



Note: Mapped commercial thinning units are preliminary proposals only and are subject to change.

Original data was compiled from multiple source data and may not meet the U.S. National Mapping Accuracy Standard of the Office of Management and Budget. For specific source dates and/or additional digital information contact the Forest Supervisor, Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512. This map has no warranties to its contents or accuracy.

