



File Code: 1950

Date: March 22, 2005

Dear Interested Party,

The Olympic National Forest is proposing to thin second growth forests to enhance structural diversity and promote the development of old growth characteristics to achieve desired conditions identified by the Forest Plan. This action would occur between Mt. Walker and Seal Rock campground in Jefferson County within the following subwatersheds: Lower Big Quilcene River, Lower Dosewallips River, and Spencer Creek/Marple Creek. There would be additional fuel treatments in units adjacent to private homes along Hwy 101 near the Seal Rock campground. The total project area is approximately 3,200 acres in size. Forest Service personnel are preparing to conduct environmental analysis of the proposed project as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The legal location of the project is: T26N, R2W, Sections 2-3, 9-10, 14-18, 20-23, and 26-27, and T27N, R2W, Sections 34-35. Please see the enclosed map.

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-hoodcanal@fs.fed.us on or before April 21, 2005. We will use any significant issues that are identified to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action. Those who respond to this scoping will receive a copy of the Environmental Assessment for a thirty day review and comment period. If you have no comments at this time, but would like to remain involved, please let us know.

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
- Reduce fuel buildup and fire hazard in the project area near the town of Brinnon and outlying homes.

There is a need for forest stands that are 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. Additionally, these stands do not provide adequate habitat for old-growth dependent species. The current stand condition is the result of past tree planting and natural reseeding following past logging activities, wildfire events, or a combination thereof.



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.

This project also provides an opportunity to reduce fuels build-up on national forest lands near or adjacent to Brinnon and its outlying areas to reduce the risk of wildfire spread to the community. If no fuels reduction action is taken, there would be an increased risk to the community in and around the town of Brinnon if a wildfire were to occur in this area.

The overall desired condition for this area is diverse, multi-storied stands that provide habitat for late successional and old-growth dependent species. Such stands would also contain openings that enhance herbaceous species on the forest floor and provide enhanced forage for deer and elk.

The Northwest Forest Plan-designated land allocations within the project area are Late-Successional Reserve (LSR), Adaptive Management Area (AMA), and Riparian Reserve (RR). The objective of LSR lands is to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems. AMAs were designated to encourage the testing of innovative approaches to integrating ecological, economic and other social and community objectives. Riparian Reserves, overlaying other Northwest Forest Plan land allocations, are intended to protect the health of the riparian and aquatic system.

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 (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 candidate stands within the planning area are approximately 40 to 65 years old in Late Successional Reserve (LSR) stands and approximately 40 to 110 years old in Adaptive Management Area (AMA) stands. 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 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. Utilizing the topographic break of the stream channel to define the riparian buffer (no harvest area) would ensure that the stream banks remain intact and stable. Additionally, prescriptions would be adjusted for unstable or potentially unstable areas within Riparian Reserves that are outside the topographic break.

The attached map and following table summarize components of the proposed action by stand unit. The units proposed include approximately 2,000 acres of AMA lands and 1,200 acres of LSR lands. Mileage estimates for temporary and reconstructed roads to be used in the proposed action are as follows: 5 to 9 miles of new temporary roads, 1.5 to 3.5 miles of reconstruction along the Bonneville Power Administration access roads, and 0.25 to 0.5 mile of reconstructing decommissioned roads. The proposed temporary roads would allow treatment in areas that are inaccessible by the current road system and provide an economically viable alternative that could generate funds to implement additional restoration treatments in the planning area. All temporary and reopened roads would be closed and decommissioned to varying degrees based on feasibility and appropriateness following harvest activity. This proposal, however, is still undergoing refinement as more field reconnaissance is done. The project's interdisciplinary team is also continuing to research the acquisition of necessary road use permits and/or easements, as well as potential locations of landing sites for helicopter logging.

Table 1. Summary of Proposed Action components by stand unit.

Unit	Proposed harvest method	Use of temporary or reconstructed decommissioned rds?	Proposed fuel reduction activities
1	Cable log	No	Slash treatment 100'-200' from rd, depending on slope
2	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
3	Cable log	No	
4	Cable log	Yes, temp. rd	
5	Cable log uphill to temp rd along unit 4	No (using temp rd in Unit 4)	
6	Cable log	No	
7	Cable log	No	
8	Cable log	No	
9	Cable log	Yes, temp. rd	
10	Cable log lower portion	Yes, reopen decomm. rd and maybe construct temp rd	
11	Cable log, and helicopter lower portion	No	
12	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
13	Ground-based, cable, and helicopter log	Yes, reconstruct BPA access rd and rd use permits needed	Shaded fuel break 400'-500' west of powerline, slash treatment on both sides of powerline
14	Cable and helicopter log	Yes, reconstruct BPA access rd and rd use permits needed	Shaded fuel break 400'-500' west of powerline, slash treatment on both sides of powerline

15	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
16	Cable log	No	
17	Cable log	No	
18	Cable log	No	
19	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
20	Cable log (potentially helicopter), omit owl core	Yes, temp. road	
21	Cable log (potential for helicopter)	Yes, temp. road with potential alternate access via private road	
22	Cable log (potential for helicopter), omit owl core	No	
23	Cable log (potential for helicopter)	Yes, temp. road with potential alternate access via private road	
24	Cable log (potential for helicopter)	Yes, temp. road with potential alternate access via private road	
25	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
26	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
27	Cable log	Yes, reconstruct decomm. rd	
28	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
29	Helicopter	No	
30	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		
31	<i>Unit eliminated from consideration</i>		

Other project components include a no harvest buffer that would be placed around an existing eagle nest, as well as a community water system, in Unit 13. A historic tramway grade is also located in Unit 13 and would be crossed twice by the proposed temporary road. The Bonneville Power Administration powerline access road would be used to access Units 13 and 14. And given potential safety concerns for recreationists, the Mt. Walker trail would be closed when harvest activities are occurring in the vicinity. Thinning activities, however, could be used to enhance the view at the top of Mt. Walker.

This proposed action also includes fuels reduction activities for Units 1, 13, and 14. Unit 1 would include piling and burning of slash within 100 feet of the road, depending on the slope of the terrain. Units 13 and 14 would have a shaded fuel break to the west and south of the powerline with slash treatment on either side of the powerline. Slash (and a shaded fuel break) would also be applied along the temporary road that extends farther north than the powerline in Unit 14. Over time, these actions should reduce the intensity and effects of any fire that moves through the area. In the meantime, the proposed fuel treatments would allow increased opportunity to contain any wildfires that occur in the vicinity.

Preliminary issues identified by the interdisciplinary team include slope instability, soil disturbance, and their potential affects to water quality and aquatic resources, especially those associated with road construction and timber harvesting in riparian reserve areas; and recreation and scenic values in the Mt. Walker area.

DECISION TO BE MADE

As a result of the environmental analysis, the responsible official (Forest Supervisor) 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,

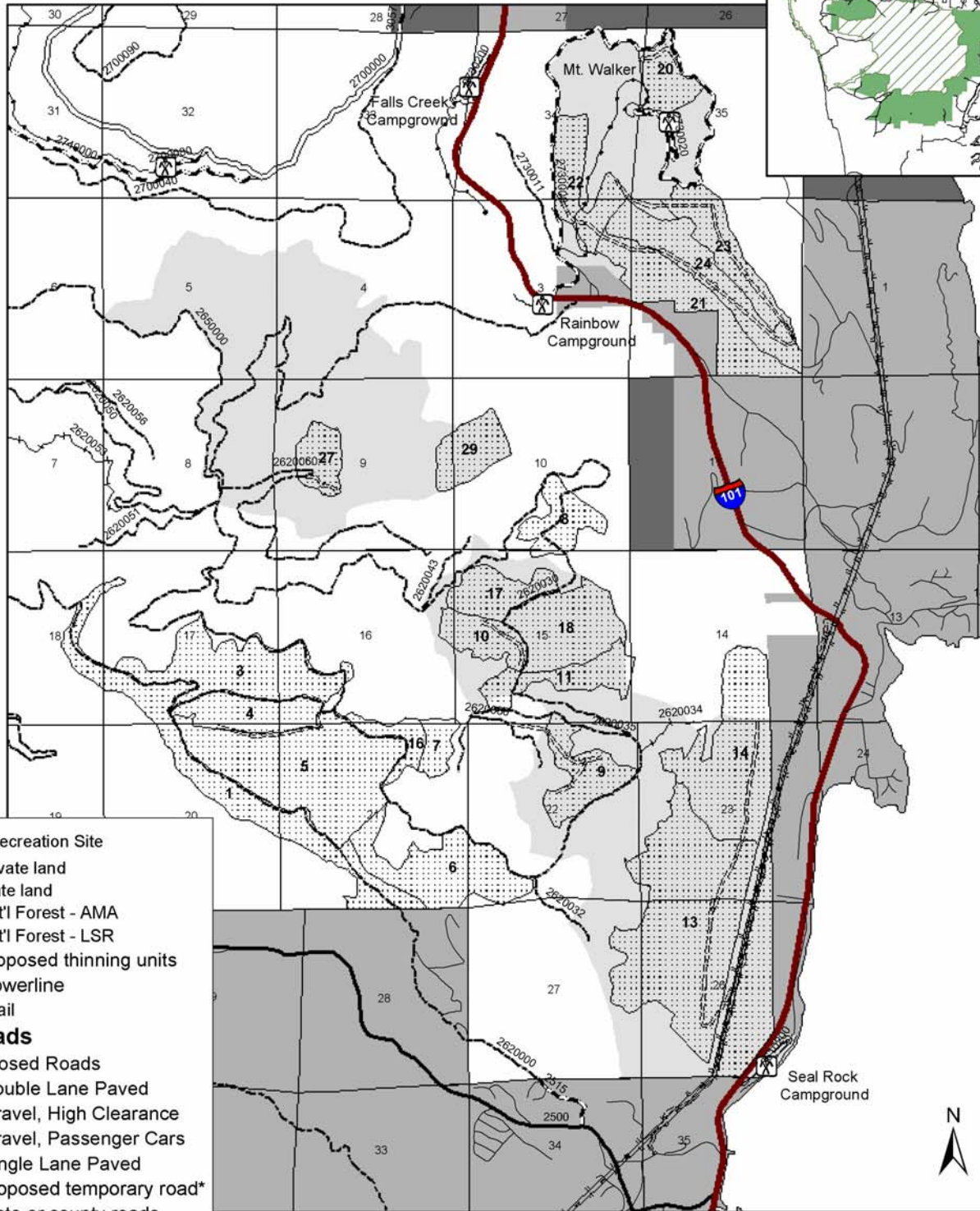
/s/

KARL DENISON
Acting District Ranger

cc: Karl Denison, Yewah Lau

Enclosure

Jackson Thinning Planning Area



Recreation Site

Private land

State land

Nat'l Forest - AMA

Nat'l Forest - LSR

Proposed thinning units

Powerline

Trail

Roads

Closed Roads

Double Lane Paved

Gravel, High Clearance

Gravel, Passenger Cars

Single Lane Paved

Proposed temporary road*

State or county roads

* Temporary road locations and lengths are approximate and may change as the proposal is further refined.



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 data and/or additional digital information, contact the Forest Supervisor, Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Ste. A, Olympia, WA 98512-562. This map has no warranties to its contents or accuracy.

