



Young Stand Crop Tree Release Decision Memo

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region
Cheat Potomac Ranger District, Monongahela National Forest
Randolph County, West Virginia

I. Decision and Project Description

A. Summary Description of Project

I have decided to authorize non-commercial thinning using the crop tree release method over approximately 16 acres.

B. Purpose and Need

This stand was regenerated approximately 20 years ago, and has since grown into an over-stocked sapling-sized stand. The numbers of stems per acre are high, with more than 1,500 in some areas. The competition in this young stand is stressful on oak and other mast producing tree species important to wildlife and hard mast production.

In this young stand, if no action were taken, as time progresses, crowding would become more severe, resulting in decreased growth and vigor for hard mast producing trees that are competing for sunlight and nutrients with faster growing trees like yellow poplar and fire cherry. Increased mortality of important mast producing tree species, such as oak or hickory, would be expected if they were not released from the competition soon. Research indicates that releasing selected crop trees less than 25 years old will increase their growth, mast production, and survival.

The Management Prescription (MP) for this stand is 6.1. Management activities in MP 6.1 areas emphasize wildlife habitat improvement, including hard mast production.

The release or thinning will be conducted to accomplish the following objectives:

- Increase the growth and ensure the survival of selected hard mast producing tree species,
- Maintain the species diversity of the stands, and
- Provide stronger potential for future mast production.

C. Project Location and Description

The project area is Stand 60 of Compartment 44. This over-stocked sapling-sized stand of hardwood trees is located in Randolph County, West Virginia, on the Cheat Potomac Ranger District. This stand is near Sully, WV, in the Glady Fork watershed, east of the Otter Creek Wilderness.

Approximately 20 to 35 trees per acre will be released in this activity. Trees will be chosen for release based on species, form, and crown size. Trees touching the crown of the tree designated for release will be girdled. Healthy butternut and American chestnut trees will not be cut or girdled. Trees not interfering with released trees and under-story shrubs will not be cut, unless necessary for safety. Trees less than 5 inches diameter at breast height may be girdled any time of the year. Trees greater than 5 inches diameter at breast height may be girdled only after November 15 and before April 1. Vines will be cut throughout the stand if they are within 30 feet of a selected crop tree. No logging equipment will be used. Commercial utilization of cut stems will not be possible because of the small size and value.

Forest Service and/or county or state roads provide access to the treatment area, making road construction or reconstruction unnecessary to accomplish this forest vegetation improvement task.

II. Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Project

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.12 or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

This project is appropriately categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is a routine activity within a category of exclusion, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the project that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment. This conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the project file.

A. Category of Exclusion

This project can be categorically excluded because it is within the category of exclusion identified in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2(6):

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

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

The extraordinary circumstances have been reviewed and are summarized below. Additional details are contained within the project record. The project is consistent with categories described under Section 31.2 of the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, as described above.

There are no extraordinary circumstances as defined in FSH 1909.15, Paragraph 30.3.2, which might cause the action to have significant effects on flora, fauna, or the quality of the human environment. Specifically:

1. The North Zone Biologist evaluated the stand for potentially occurring proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive (PETS) species. Their habitat and potential for presence was also reviewed from district and forest occurrence records. It was determined that the stand is within 5 miles of the Indiana bat hibernacula. The biological evaluation concluded that this project will have no effect for any PETS species or their critical habitat. No known cave resources will be affected by this project.
2. The Forest Archaeologist evaluated the potential for loss of, or damage to historic resources. Pre-commercial thinning using hand tools will not cause soil disturbance, and there are no known Historic Resources within the project areas. This project will have no impact on American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.
3. The activity area is not in a floodplain or wetland. The project will have no impact on any floodplain or wetland.
4. No part of this project is congressionally designated as wilderness, wilderness study area, or national recreation area. This project will have no impact on any wilderness, wilderness study area, or national recreation area.
5. There are no administratively designated areas such as Roadless Areas, or Research Natural Areas within the area affected by the project, and this project will have no impact on administratively designated areas.

No other extraordinary circumstances related to this project were identified.

III. Public Involvement

This project was scoped, beginning with the interdisciplinary team process. On July 10, 2008 the scoping began with the identification of internal issues. This initial notice was used to identify interested publics in addition to those already known and on an established mailing list. A letter with attached map was mailed to all individuals and organizations identified as having potential interest in the project. A list of the more than 80 agencies, groups, and individuals contacted is on file in the project record at the Cheat Potomac

Ranger District office in Petersburg, West Virginia. Three comments were received, all supportive of the project.

The 30-day Notice and Comment period started on August 13, 2008 with publication of a legal notice in the Parsons Advocate. The draft analysis, along with information on how to comment on the proposal, was mailed to the people who had responded during the scoping period. No additional comments were received during the Notice and Comment period.

IV. Findings Required By And/Or Related To Other Laws and Regulations

This project will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. This project is consistent with the goals and management directions, including the standards and guidelines in the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Monongahela National Forest, as revised in September, 2006.

This project is not in a visually sensitive area and there will be no change in visual quality as a result of this project.

Civil rights impact analysis is an integrated requirement for projects falling under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including those projects that qualify for categorical exclusion. This project is located solely on National Forest System land. During internal scoping, the interdisciplinary team could not identify any affected private property, or any direct effects that single out individuals or groups, including those defined as minorities or other identified categories. The project will be done by force account (Forest Service employees) or be contracted out through a bidding process that provides equal opportunity to all individuals, organizations, and businesses authorized to live, work, and/or operate in the United States.

No social issues of any type were identified during public scoping. There is no record of an environmental justice issue being identified on any MNF Forest vegetation management project prepared under the current Forest Plan. The absence of effects or issues leads to the conclusion that civil rights and environmental justice impacts will not occur as a result of this project, and that additional analysis of these issues is unnecessary.

V. Appeal Opportunities

The 30-day Notice and Comment period for this project ended on September 12, 2008. Since no comments expressing concerns were received or only supportive comments were received during the Notice and Comment period, this decision is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.12).

VI. Implementation Date

Implementation may begin immediately.

VII. Contact Person

Further information about this decision may be obtained during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) from:

Glen Juergens, Forest Silviculturist
Monongahela National Forest
200 Sycamore Street
Elkins, WV 26241
Phone: (304) 636-1800 ext 292
Fax: (304) 637-7304
Email: gjuergens@fs.fed.us

VIII. Signature of Responsible Official and Date

Samuel R. Lammie
SAMUEL R. LAMMIE
Monongahela National Forest
Acting District Ranger – Cheat Potomac District Ranger
Responsible Official

September 22, 2008
Date

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