



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

December 2008



# Finding of No Significance

## Jocko Lakes Fire Salvage

Seeley Lake Ranger District, Lolo National Forest  
Missoula County, Montana

For Information Contact: Tim Love  
Seeley Lake Ranger District  
3583 Highway 83  
Seeley Lake MT 59868  
(406)677-2233

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call toll free (866) 632-9992 (voice). TDD users can contact USDA through local relay or the Federal relay at (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (relay voice). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

# Finding of No Significant Impact

## Jocko Lakes Fire Salvage

USDA Forest Service

Seeley Ranger District, Lolo National Forest  
Missoula County, Montana

After considering the environmental effects described in the attached Jocko Lakes Fire Salvage Environmental Assessment (EA) (40 CFR 1508.13), and the project planning record, I have determined that the actions associated with Alternative 3, the modified proposed action, will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of its impacts (40CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.



**DEBORAH L. R. AUSTIN**  
Forest Supervisor  
Lolo National Forest

12/19/08  
Date

### I base my finding on the following:

The Jocko Lakes Fire Salvage project (JLFS) would salvage timber from 1,648 acres of the 11,648 acres of National Forest Land that burned in the Jocko Lakes fire of 2007; thus salvage will occur on 14% of the federal lands burned in that fire and 86% of the burned area will not be salvaged. Un-harvested post fire vegetation is not rare on the Lolo NF or on the Seeley Ranger District. Ninety four percent of the Seeley Lake Ranger District and 86% of the Lolo National Forest has burned since 1980 and has had no harvest either prior to the burn or after the burn. The JLFS will affect a small fraction of these lands (0.6% and 1.4% respectively).

JLFS would implement project activities that are of limited scope and duration, affecting only local residents and visitors to the immediate treatment units. The duration of treatment operations would span nine months during the summer, fall and winter (EA p.13, #14), with 94% of the harvest activities occurring in the winter months as a resource protection measure (EA p.16, #30). Implementation of all activities may span four years, 2009 - 2012.

**1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.** My finding of no significant effect on the quality of the human environment is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action. I fully considered the effects of the modified proposed action (Alternative 3), both potentially adverse and beneficial.

**No Effects:** The EA considered all the resource values that could be adversely affected by implementation of the modified proposed action. Initial project design and resource protection measures effectively eliminated or reduced to negligible most of the potential impacts, therefore, implementation of the proposed action would result in no meaningful effect to the following resource elements: water yields, stream channel stability or function (EA p.30, 32); stream temperatures, stream woody debris, pool

habitat, off-channel habitat, fish refugia, floodplain connectedness, stream bank stability, stream width/depth ratios, peak/base flows, and drainage network. (p.33, 34); weed infestations (p.48, 49); threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species or their habitat (p.50); recreation opportunity spectrum (51); natural regeneration, old growth, native plant species (p.54, 55); potential fireline intensity (p.56), air quality (p.57), human health, minority or low-income populations (p.58); heritage resources (p.59); adequate Forest access (p.59).

There would be no impact to: peregrine falcon, harlequin duck, townsend's big-eared bat, common loon, northern leopard frog, Coeur d'Alene salamander (p.34), gray wolf (p.36); northern bog lemming (p. 44); bald eagle (p.45).

**Beneficial Effects:** The EA documents the following beneficial effects of implementing the modified proposed action: accelerated recovery of soil quality in Unit 2-1 (EA p.26, 27); slight decrease in road density in Finley Slippery 6th Code HUC (p.30); long-term decrease of 17.7 tons annually of sedimentation (p.30, 31); decreased potential road related mortality and conflicts between wildlife and humans (p.41, 42, 51); restored aquatic species access to approximately 2.5 miles of Finley Creek (p. 33); increase elk security by 263 acres (p.39); controlling invasive weeds (p.50); 10.6 million board feet of commercial timber (p.54); enhanced regeneration of ponderosa pine and western larch (p.55); net present value for all activities of \$927,940, and 259 jobs and \$7.8 million of labor income attributed to this project<sup>1</sup>.

**Potential Adverse Effects:** The EA documents the following potential adverse impacts from implementation of the modified proposed action. From the EA's concise analysis and summation of the context and intensity of these impacts, I've determined they are not significant effects on the quality of the human environment.

Soils (EA p.26-29): Implementing the modified proposed action will disturb soil, but in all units, except Unit 2-1 which currently has more than 15% detrimental soil disturbance, detrimental disturbance will remain below 15% of the unit area. This means that the soil disturbance would be within the accepted soil quality standard established to assure that nutrient cycling, nutrient availability and soil productivity are maintained. Resource protection measures (p.14, # 15a) will move Unit 2-1 toward an accelerated net improvement in soil quality after salvaging, as required in Forest Service Manual 2554.03. The primary type of disturbance in this unit is historic compaction with rutting on skid trails where coarse woody debris is currently lacking. By adding coarse woody debris, the modified proposed action will restore one of the most important elements in retaining soil productivity and long term health to this site. Region 1 Soil Quality Standards would be met.

Hydrology & Fisheries: Sedimentation (EA p.30-32): The modified proposed action would implement three activities (undersized culvert removal and replacement; road maintenance; and, road storage and decommissioning) that would contribute to minor, short-term stream sedimentation. After the initial sediment pulse, these activities would reduce sediment year after year for a long-term benefit in sediment reduction (approximately 17.7 tons annually). A short-term specified road, 210 feet which equals 0.14 acres, will be built within an RCHA, but because there is an existing system road between the stream and the proposed temp road no sediment would be delivered to the stream.

May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect bull trout determination under the Endangered Species Act; May Impact Westslope cutthroat individuals, but is Not Likely to Result in a Trend toward Federal Listing (p. 33-34) – As the location of one culvert removal and road obliteration activity is immediately above likely

---

<sup>1</sup> Because of post fire decay the volume estimate has dropped to approximately 4.5 MMBF. This reduction in volume will result in less economic and work force related benefits, however the project is still a feasible timber sale with a positive present net value anticipated.

bull trout spawning gravels, this project would result in incidental take. Each culvert removal and replacement would last less than one week and would generate sediment that would affect downstream spawning gravels until the next spring flow. A separate Biological Assessment regarding effects to federally listed fish species and critical habitat located within the analysis area was submitted to Fish and Wildlife Service on August 2, 2008. Sediment from these actions may have a short-term affect on individual Westslope cutthroat trout and its habitat as well.

The same actions that would cause the small, short-term negative impacts to fisheries have the following long-term beneficial effects to fisheries: restore aquatic species access to 2.5 miles of Finley Creek and associated fish habitat; reduce approximately 12.7 tons of potential stream sedimentation annually over the long-term, reducing potential for substrate embeddedness; and, slightly reduce road density in the Finley Slippery 6th Code HUC.

Wildlife: May Affect individuals, Not Likely to Adversely Affect: grizzly bear, Canada lynx (EA p. 35-36). May Impact Individuals or Habitat but would not Likely Contribute towards a trend in Federal listing or cause a loss of viability: pileated woodpecker, elk, goshawks, fisher, wolverine, black-backed woodpecker, flammulated owl (p.37-48) – Disturbance of wildlife may occur but it will be minimized in time and space. Disturbance would be limited to the period of implementation (2009-2012) and the allowable operating season between July 1 and March 31. That means no harvest activities would occur between April 1 and July 30. The disturbance would be limited to the 1,648 acres of salvage which is 14% of the National Forest area burned in the Jocko Fire. This means 86% of the area will not have logging activity. For all species considered there would be adequate habitat to displace to during the short-term disturbance. Some habitat components of these species may be changed by proposed actions, but would not be lost and are therefore minor and dismissible. The following paragraphs discuss potential loss of specific types of habitat.

Pileated Nesting Habitat (p.37-38) – Ten acres of pileated nesting habitat would become unsuitable. This is a small fraction, 0.05%, of the available nesting habitat in the project area. Additionally, 100% of the standing dead and live trees will be retained on 10,017 acres or 86% of the area burned by the Jocko fire. Region 1 provides over 20 times as much pileated woodpecker habitat as is necessary and the Lolo NF alone provides approximately 1.7 times as much habitat as is necessary to maintain minimum viable populations.

Elk Marginal Cover (p.39) – One hundred and fifty acres of “marginal” elk cover would become unsuitable. Cover will continue to be provided on over 90% of the sites treated. There would be over 3,100 acres of cover to disperse to in the project area. Elk numbers are at or near modern day highs.

Goshawk Nesting and Post Fledgling Habitat (p.40-41) – Sixty nine acres of nesting and post fledgling habitat would become unsuitable. The affect would be from skyline corridors. Sixty nine acres is 1% of the available habitat in project area. Goshawk habitat in Region 1 is abundant and well distributed, and more nesting habitat exists today than occurred historically. A comparison of habitat estimates for maintaining viable populations indicates that given the natural distribution of habitat, each Forest in Region 1 has an excess of available goshawk habitat.

Black-backed Woodpecker habitat (p.46) – One thousand sixty two acres or 1% of the habitat available within 30 miles of the project area would become unsuitable habitat. Habitat for the black-backed woodpecker is abundant and well distributed across Region 1 and the Lolo National Forest. Habitat has recently increased with the trend likely to continue. The level of timber salvage is insignificant in relation to the needs of this species. Ninety four percent of National Forest lands burned on the Seeley Lake Ranger District since 1980 have had no pre-fire or post-fire harvest.

Recreation: (EA p.51-52) – Snowmobilers would be displaced temporarily, during weekdays, but not likely on weekends, within the project area. There are over 160 miles of designated snowmobile routes available on the Seeley Lake Ranger District and 750 miles available on the Lolo National Forest so other opportunities would be available during JLFS operations. The possibility of unauthorized OHV access is reduced through resource protection measures and monitoring. Motorized access would be reduced on 3.8 miles of National Forest System road currently open to the public, and closed through decommissioning or storage.

Visuals: (EA p.52, 53) – On 364 acres that have a partial retention visual quality objective, salvage logging may be evident in contrast to the un-harvested areas. The affect would be short-term, 3 – 5 years until the growth of new grasses, shrubs, and planted trees begin to soften the effects of salvage operations. Eight different resource protection measures however, will minimize even these potential short-term visual effects. (p.15-16, #22 to #29).

**2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** It is my determination that by incorporating the resource protection measures for air quality (EA p.24, #14, #72, #73), and recreation (p.14-15, #16 to #21) and because there would be no change to potential fireline intensity (p.56), the modified proposed action will have no significant adverse effects on public health and safety.

**3. Unique characteristic of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farms, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical area.** The modified proposed action will not impact historical or cultural resources (EA p.59) or wetlands (p.20, #52). The project area does not contain any parklands, prime farms, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas.

**4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Effects analysis was conducted using scientific literature (see Literature Cited), and the interdisciplinary team reviewed literature cited in public comments on the project (EA Appendix C). I received some general concerns about salvage logging through the scoping process, but the majority of the comments I received were in support of the proposed action. I communicated with those concerned with implementation of this project and based on their input modified the project design and proposal to further eliminate potential public concerns. No highly-controversial or significant issues related to the human environment were identified during scoping or through the analysis process (EA p.4).

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk.** The modified proposed action (Alternative 3) is similar to the West Petty salvage sale which was a fire salvage project using primarily winter yarding, implemented on the Ninemile Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest in 2004 without significant effects (PF-M19). Analysis of the modified proposed action considered the effects of past actions, such as the West Petty salvage, as a frame of reference in conjunction with scientifically accepted analytical techniques, available information, and best professional experience and judgment to estimate effects to the human environment. It is my conclusion that there are no uncertain or unique characteristics in the project area which have not been previously encountered or that would constitute an unknown risk to the human environment.

**6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principal about a future consideration,** The modified proposed action will not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The proposed activities are similar in nature and effects to many other projects in the immediate area and are consistent

with the Lolo National Forest Plan. This action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any proposed future project must be evaluated on its own merits and effects.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individual insignificant but cumulative significant impacts.** Cumulative effects were carefully considered for all resources and were determined not to be significant (Analysis throughout EA and Resource Reports).

**8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highway structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.** A comprehensive heritage resource study was conducted (Heritage Report p. 2). Project specific management plans that provide site protection have been developed (information resides with The Lolo National Forest Archeologist - McLeod 2007) (EA p.59). There are two federally recognized tribes, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai, in the JLFS area requiring direct consultation as provided by 36 CFR 800. They were contacted as part of normal section 106 consultations for this project as an interested party. No comments were received from any interested parties concerning any potential adverse effects to recorded archaeological sites, nor has there been any concern this project may effect areas of spiritual or traditional use (p.59).

**9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The project biologist determined that the modified proposed action would have No Effect on gray wolves, May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect on Canada lynx and grizzly bears. Bull Trout would Likely be Adversely Affected in the short term, but in the long term would benefit from the proposed project. A Biological Assessment regarding effects to federally listed fish species and critical habitat located within the analysis area was submitted to Fish and Wildlife Service on August 2, 2008. The Forest received written concurrence and terms and conditions from the USFWS on 11/17/2008 and 12/17/2008 (PF-K-7 and PF-K-8).

**10. Whether the proposed action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** Applicable laws, regulations and consistency with the Lolo National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan were considered in all of the Resource Reports (PF-M6-1 through M18-1). It was determined the actions will not violate Federal, State, or local laws, the Forest Plan or requirements for the protection of the environment.