

File Code: 1950-1

Date: January 25, 2008

Dear Interested Party,

Today I made the decision to implement Alternative B modified as described in the Decision Notice for the Environmental Assessment for Jackson Thinning. This decision approves the commercial thinning of approximately 1,590 acres of second-growth forest stands in the Dosewallips River, Upper West Hood Canal Frontal, and Big Quilcene River watersheds. The thinning would occur to the south and southwest of Mt. Walker. Harvest will be by helicopter, cable, and ground based logging systems. Thinning will remove smaller diameter trees to create additional growing space for the remaining larger trees, and will result in forested stands with 60 to 90 percent crown closure. Related road use will include existing open and closed Forest system roads (30.2 miles); unclassified, abandoned roads (2.4 miles); and new temporary road (3.1 miles). All unclassified, abandoned roads and new temporary roads will be decommissioned following project implementation. Additionally, 1.2 miles of existing, open Forest system roads that are used will be closed following implementation.

Some personal observations I made as I followed the Jackson Thinning planning process over the past two years were the public's 1) overwhelming concern for the Mt. Walker area and 2) their concern over the construction of roads for timber sale activities while we continue to have a backlog of roads in need of decommissioning. In the many letters I received during the public comment period it's apparent that Mt Walker is held very dear by many local and far-away residents and that there was expectation that I do everything possible to protect this special mountain. It appeared that many held the impression that any thinning activities would result in clearcuts as found on many private and State timberlands. How times have changed! The Northwest Forest Plan introduced approximately 15 years ago changed the cultural and economic landscape of the Olympic peninsula that continues to evolve today. Gone are the days of the Forest Service clearcut; in its place the vast majority of timber harvest activities involve thinning to accelerate development of forest stands to historic old-growth conditions—a daunting task for employees and forest partners, but equally satisfying as we realize thousands of acres of thinned forests.

As we progressed through the planning process, it became apparent that the forest stands located on Mt. Walker and particularly in Unit 6 are already beginning to develop some of the old growth characteristics we are trying to achieve through thinning. Therefore, I made the decision not to thin those areas. What I would like to highlight, however, is the intense level of analysis undertaken to insure that any thinning would not adversely affect the visual quality experience for the forest user visiting or viewing Mt. Walker should I have decided to thin that area. We worked closely with the University of Washington's Olympic Natural Resource Center using the Landscape Modeling System and Stand Visualization to create images of how visual quality might be impacted from the proposed thinning. In general, we found that visual quality objectives could be met by following project design criteria, such as strategically placing skyline yarding corridors and landings, having no-cut buffers along the Mt. Walker Trail, flush cutting



stumps within 100 feet of the Mt. Walker trail and road. We also found that evidence of highly noticeable logging activity such as landings and cable corridors were not discernable after one year once vegetation was reestablished.

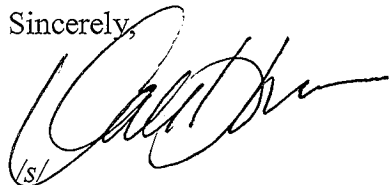
The recovery strategies for federally listed fish species in the Hood Canal and Puget Sound basins continue to emphasize the need to decommission certain roads on Forest Service lands since our abilities to maintain these roads are hindered by declining budgets and aging infrastructure (e.g., culverts and bridges). It appears counterintuitive to be opening unclassified, abandoned roads or constructing new temporary roads and then decommissioning these roads in the name of ecosystem restoration when we have a backlog of hundred of miles of system roads in need of decommissioning. Serious consideration is given, however, before a decision is made to reopen a road or construct a new temporary one. We evaluate each road with respect to riparian areas, slope stability, soil productivity and terrestrial species in order to ensure that the impact of those roads do not outweigh the benefits from their use. If resource concerns associated with temporary roads can be minimized, the use of temporary roads for access is substantially more economical than helicopter yarding. Reduced implementation costs equate to greater revenue from the timber sale that can be used for additional road decommissioning and other restoration projects within the project area. Reopening unclassified, abandoned roads not only allows for cost-effective project implementation, but also provides a final opportunity to fully decommission roads that were constructed over half century ago. Such decommissioning work may involve fixing problem sites such as slumping roadbeds or removal of old culverts. An added benefit to utilizing unclassified/abandoned or new temporary roads is that the costs of reopening or constructing and then decommissioning the roads are borne by the timber sale purchaser as part of their operational costs and by revenue generated from the timber sale, rather than by the Forest's road maintenance funds.

Copies of the Decision Notice, Finding of No Significant Impact, response to comments received during the public notice and comment period (Appendix E), and final environmental assessment are available online at the Olympic National Forest web page, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/olympic/projects-nu/index.shtml>; or upon request from the Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd, SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512. For those who commented on the project, the Decision Notice and response to comments are enclosed.

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215 by individuals or organizations who provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action during the comment period. Any appeal must be filed to the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days following publication of legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record, *The Olympian*. The publication date of notice of the decision is the sole means of calculating the appeal filing deadline. See the Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities section of the Decision Notice for details on filing appeals.

For additional information concerning this decision contact Tim Davis, Forest Planner at the Olympic National Forest Supervisors Office, 1835 Black Lake Blvd, SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512 or phone (360) 956-2375.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dale Hom". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D".

DALE HOM
Forest Supervisor