

Decision Memo

Trail Bridge Blowdown Salvage Project

USDA Forest Service
Willamette National Forest
McKenzie River Ranger District

T.15S. R6E Sec.1; W.M.
Linn County, Oregon

Decision

It is my decision to implement the Trail Bridge Blowdown Salvage Project, which will remove approximately 185 wind-thrown and root sprung trees. The trees will be sold in a timber sale and will yield approximately 190,000 board feet of merchantable wood products. The project area is approximately 17 acres and located along the McKenzie River above the Trail Bridge Reservoir. The root sprung trees are near a section of the McKenzie River National Recreation Trail and adjacent to Forest roads 2600-655 and 2600-735, and are considered potentially hazardous to the public within these areas.

No temporary roads will be constructed. No ground-disturbing activities will occur within the inner gorge of the McKenzie River during project implementation. Trees will be removed with ground-based logging equipment that operates on slash to protect soil resources.

Background

A winter storm event in December 2006 caused the timber blowdown. The timber stands affected contain pockets of root rot, which contributed to conditions that made the stands susceptible to wind throw. The Eugene Water & Electric Board hydroelectric generation facilities and employee housing are within ½ mile of the blowdown area. EWEB has expressed a concern that the blowdown area near EWEB facilities poses a fire hazard.

In the summer of 2007, the high density of blowdown trees attracted Douglas-fir beetles and resulted in a large infestation in the blowdown area. If the down trees are left in place, the bark beetles are likely to disperse to other trees in spring 2008, potentially infecting and defoliating other healthy trees within riparian areas along the McKenzie River. The windstorm affected approximately 8 acres of shade trees along the inner gorge of the river, and further loss of shade from bark beetle infestation may result in a measurable increase in water temperature. The project area contains productive soils and is located on a dry, flat slope, dominated by second growth and mature mixed conifer

forests. Presently, there are 70-90 standing residual trees per acre. Some areas have open gaps that will allow for understory development.

Proposed Action

Trees proposed for salvaged consist of Douglas fir with a minor component of Western red cedar that average 20-25 inches dbh and 120 ft. in height. This project is targeted to be implemented by early April 2008 to be most effective in reducing the emergence of bark beetles, and to lower the potential for the beetles to spread to shade trees. At risk is further degradation of riparian conditions from the bark beetles. This action will allow reduction in fuel loads adjacent to the EWEB facilities. This project will also provide large woody material to be used for stream restoration projects. A completed integrated resource operation plan is located in the project analysis file.

Project Design Criteria:

- Wind thrown trees will only be salvaged from the terrace areas along Forest roads. Trees must be removed from the area as soon as possible, preferably in early April 2008, to minimize further infestation of bark beetle in the riparian shade trees along the McKenzie River.
- No wind thrown trees will be salvaged from the river channel or within the inner gorge of the river.
- Within the project area, woody material at least 20 inches in diameter and greater than 20 ft. long or greater will be left on site as required by Forest Plan Standard and Guidelines.
- There will be a 120 ft. “no harvest” buffer starting from the edge of McKenzie River up to the topography break. An additional “equipment restriction” buffer will be in place 60 feet from the unit no-harvest area boundary to ensure that equipment remains at least 180 ft. from waterways in the project area.
- Shovel logging equipment will be required to minimize the disturbance to soils, because this type of equipment is capable of operating on logging slash.
- Exposed ground will be seeded with native species where necessary.
- No fuel storage will be allowed within 600 feet of a waterway.
- The haul routes and landings will be maintained to have sufficient aggregate surfacing to minimize erosion potential. Any erosion observed on the roadway during implementation will require that operations be suspended as specified in the timber sale contract.
- Yarding equipment will be limited to slopes less than 30%

Reasons for Categorical Exclusion

I find that this project is within a category of actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment, and can be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS. The project fits Category 13, in the Forest Service Handbook FSH 1909.15 – Environmental Policy and Procedures, 31.2 (13a); “Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.” A project or case file is required and the decision to proceed must be documented in a decision memo.

I have determined there are no extraordinary circumstances, based on the following information:

- a.** A Biological Assessment for fisheries was completed that found the project will have No Effect on ESA-listed bull trout and spring Chinook salmon downstream from the project area. Consultation with the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service and USDC National Marine Fisheries is therefore not required. There are no adverse effects to any other federally listed threatened or endangered species; designated critical habitat; to any species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or to any Forest Service sensitive species. Biological Evaluations plants and wildlife species have been completed and documentation is available in the project files.
- b.** This project does not affect flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.
- c.** This project is within the McKenzie River Wild and Scenic River corridor (Forest Plan Management Area MA-6d). Salvage is allowed within this segment of the McKenzie River WSR, but no activities will occur in or near the McKenzie River to affect river flows. This project will not affect the outstandingly remarkable values for which this WSR river segment was selected for. The project is not within any other congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.
- d.** This project does not affect Inventoried Roadless Areas.
- e.** This project does not affect any Research Natural Areas.
- f.** This project does not affect American Indian religious or cultural sites.
- g.** This project will not affect any known archeological sites or historic properties or areas. Cultural surveys were performed on the project area, and no sites or historic properties were found. Results of the surveys can be found in the project file.

Scoping and Public Involvement

A scoping letter dated September 11, 2007 was mailed to members of the public and organizations who have previously expressed an interest in similar projects. The project was also listed in the Forest Focus, the Willamette National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) starting with the summer of 2007 edition. Approximately 300 comments were received by email following the public mailing and SOPA listing.

The District received comments expressing concern over the proposal to salvage timber in the vicinity of the McKenzie River, with most concerns based on three issues: 1) There was public concern that the salvage could adversely affect water quality in the McKenzie River and downstream, 2) many commenters felt that trees that have fallen into the river should be left for valuable fisheries habitat, and 3) because the project area is located in a very popular recreation area many thought that the salvage timber sale would adversely affect public use of the National Scenic Trail and McKenzie River in the project area.

The District Interdisciplinary Team prepared design criteria detailed above to address these public concerns and to protect resources. The following measures are included and respond to the above three issues:

- To maintain water quality, there will be large no-harvest buffers near waterways, and yarding will be done with shovel logging equipment to protect soils. Aggregate surfacing will be required on haul roads and landings and salvage operations will be suspended if any erosion is detected.
- As stated above, a 120 ft. no-harvest buffer will ensure that no trees will be removed from the McKenzie River channel or inner gorge to retain large wood in the stream for highly-valued fisheries habitat.
- The popularity of this area for recreation was an important consideration during project planning. Timber salvage operations will be required to be completed within a limited operation period to reduce the duration of any trail closure on the McKenzie River National Recreation Trail, and to shorten any restriction of public access to the project area in general.

Findings of Consistency

I have determined that the proposed action is consistent with the 1990 Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended. The project complies with the Standards and Guidelines for the following Land Allocations and Management areas: MA-11c Scenic Retention Foreground, MA-15 Riparian Reserves, MA-6d Upper McKenzie River Wild and Scenic River corridor. The project also lies within the Upper McKenzie Key Watershed.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This unsigned Decision Memo is subject to notice and comment appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. You may send your comments on the proposed action to:

- 1) The McKenzie River Ranger District, Attn: Mary Allison, District Ranger, 57600 McKenzie Highway, McKenzie Bridge, Oregon 97413;
- 2) Or fax to 541-822-7254
- 3) Or email to comments-pacificnorthwest-willamette_mckenzieriver@fs.fed.us.

The opportunity to comment ends 30-days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Register Guard, Eugene, Oregon. Only persons submitting timely comments regarding this proposal may appeal the final decision (36 CFR 215.6). For appeal eligibility, each individual or representative of an organization must sign the comments or verify identity upon request. Timeliness of comments will be determined by postmark, time, and date stamp at the McKenzie River District office or the agency's electronic acknowledgement for electronically submitted comments. Please include in your response the following information: 1) name, address, and (if possible) telephone number; 2) title of the project on which comment is being submitted. Please refer to 36 CFR Part 215 for details on the format for submitting comments such as signatures, oral comments or electronically mailed comments. Comments received will become a matter of public record.

The office of General Council in the Department of Agriculture determined that the names and addresses of persons that respond to solicitations for comments for Forest Service projects are subject to the Freedom of information act and subject to public review. Comments received in response to the proposed action, including names, addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on the proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments received anonymously will be accepted and considered; however those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

Implementation Date

If no comments are received during the 30-day public comment period, the project may be implemented immediately. If comments are received, the decision will be subject to a 45-day administrative appeal period. If no administrative appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on but not before 5 days from

the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on but not before 15 days following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Contact Person

For further information please contact Special Forest Products Forester Shadie Nimer, at (541) 822-3381; by mail at 57600 McKenzie Hwy, McKenzie Bridge, OR 97413; or email at snimer@fs.fed.us.

MARY ALLISON
District Ranger

Date

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Trail Bridge Blowdown Salvage Salvage Sale Map Willamette National Forest McKenzie River Ranger District

