

## Decision Memo

### Dungeness Stewardship Thinning Project

USDA Forest Service  
Hood Canal Ranger District, Olympic National Forest  
Clallam County, Washington  
T29N, R04W, Section 20

#### BACKGROUND

The Hood Canal Ranger District has identified opportunities to provide habitat benefits to aquatic resources and Roosevelt elk in the McDonald Creek drainage that included thinning second growth forest for elk habitat enhancement. The stand proposed for thinning originated following past logging of old-growth forest, is approximately 65 years old and in the competitive exclusion/biomass accumulation stage of stand development.

The purpose of and need for this project is to:

- Achieve the ecological objective of providing a demonstration and trial of using commercial thinning as a tool to promote the development of structural complexity in the forest stand faster than it might otherwise develop. The focus of the ecological objective arises due to a general lack of structural complexity on the forested landscape today. A large portion of modern stands originated following widespread logging of structurally complex old-growth. The resulting young stands are generally in the structurally simple developmental stage known as “competitive exclusion.” The thinning will provide improved habitat for elk, and other species.
- Achieve the economic objective of generating revenue through sale of the timber to provide funding for needed restoration activity on roads and elk habitat.

The project area is located in the McDonald Creek drainage within the McDonald Creek Watershed in Clallam County. The legal location of the project is: T29N, R04W, Section 20.

The Northwest Forest Plan-designated land allocations within the project area are Adaptive Management Area (AMA) and Riparian Reserve. Adaptive Management Areas are landscape units designated to encourage the development and testing of technical and social approaches to achieving desired ecological, economic, and other social objectives. Riparian Reserves, overlaying other Northwest Forest Plan land allocations, are intended to protect the health of the riparian and aquatic system.

#### DECISION

I have decided to implement the thinning of the proposed 69 acres in the McDonald Creek drainage as detailed below.

The stand will be thinned using a prescription that results in variable spacing between retained trees and that is feasible for the Forest Service and contractors. The spacing between the retained trees will also vary within the stand. There will be some patches that are not thinned (skips),

some that are heavily thinned and relatively open (gaps), and the matrix where a few different thinning intensities may be implemented. Skips, gaps and matrix areas will be located with consideration for pre-existing conditions. The species and sizes of cut and retained trees will be determined to meet the ecological objective. In moist areas, alder may be encouraged to grow for its positive effects on biodiversity, nitrogen input, and tree growth. In the Riparian Reserves, the goal will be to produce the size and quantity of large woody debris sufficient to sustain physical complexity and stability of the riparian reserves and associated streams. The project will evaluate the tradeoffs of including both ecological and economic objectives. For example, the size and number of heavy thinning areas may be done in a way that benefits both the ecological and economic objectives. The heavy thin areas may also provide grazing areas for elk. The thinning will be designed to minimize undesired disturbance to riparian areas, soils, and retained vegetation. Monitoring plots will be established and measured for determined variables (for example the types and amounts of understory vegetation) prior to thinning, then re-measured immediately after thinning, and at intervals over time. Monitoring will be conducted by the Dungeness Collaborative Group.

There will be no new, reconstructed, or temporary roads built under the proposed action. The proposed thinning unit will be cable yarded, incorporating the use of intermediate supports to maintain log suspension and reduce impacts to forest soils.

### **Mitigation Measures:**

#### Aquatic

- Incorporate all conditions of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Hydraulic Project Approval permit.
- Trees felled in no-cut riparian buffers due to yarding operations will be left in stream or riparian area.
- Leave all existing wood in streams, unless designated for removal by a fisheries biologist.
- Any machinery maintenance involving potential contaminants will occur at an approved site or greater than 100 feet from wetlands, waterbodies, or stream channels.
- A watershed specialist or fish biologist shall be consulted prior to modifying any of the project design criteria that could impact aquatic resources.
- Locate post-harvest canopy openings at least 100 feet from floodplains and stream valley floors to maintain conifer trees in the stream-influence zone.

#### Botany and Invasive Plants

Mitigation measures in this section are based on best management practices and the standards set forth in the record of decision for the Pacific Northwest Region invasive plant program (USDA 2005). When approved, follow the standards in the Olympic National Forest site-specific invasive plant treatment project (USDA 2006).

- The purchaser/permittee shall be responsible for preventing and treating the spread of invasive plants in the project area as stated in the noxious weed/exotic plant prevention and control supplemental clause. The purchaser/permittee shall consult with Forest Service invasive plant specialists to develop and implement a site-specific plan for invasive species prevention and treatment. Additionally, monitoring and follow-up

treatments shall occur as needed for up to three years after the ground disturbing activities are completed.

- Purchaser/permittee shall ensure that off-road equipment to be used outside the limits of the road prism is free of invasive plant material including soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds (equipment cleaning clause C6.36).
- Use only gravel, fill, sand, and rock that is judged to be weed-free by District or Forest weed specialists.
- Site restoration planning shall include an evaluation of the need to seed a site or use other erosion control measures. When needed, use weed free straw and give priority to seed mixes/plantings with local native species.

### Wildlife

- Project activities creating noise above ambient levels will not occur within the harassment distance of specified equipment from March 1 to August 5.
- Activities producing noise above ambient levels will start no earlier than 2 hours after sunrise and shall cease 2 hours before sunset from April 1 to September 15.
- Danger trees greater than 21" dbh within suitable habitat for northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet will be reviewed by wildlife biologist prior to being cut.
- Any active raptor nest located during thinning operations will have appropriate conservation measures applied (species specific).
- A wildlife biologist shall be consulted prior to modifying any of the project design criteria that could impact wildlife resources.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment as under the Forest Service Handbook Title 1909.15 Chapter 30, Section 13.2(12): "harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than 1/2-mile of temporary road construction." The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment, and it does not, individually or cumulatively, have a significant effect (40 CFR 1508.27) on the quality of the human environment.

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

This project was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions since October 1, 2005. Scoping letters to the public were mailed on September 18, 2006. In addition, the Jamestown S'Klallam Indian Tribe and Point No Point Tribe were consulted with on this project and have representation on the Collaborative Group. Four comments were received regarding this project; three responses indicated that they were in favor of the project. One commenter favored clearcut harvesting. Because clearcut harvesting does not meet the Purpose and Need of using thinning prescriptions to promote the development of forest structural complexity, that option was dropped from further consideration.

This project will be implemented under the Stewardship Contracting Authority, Public Law 108-7, which allows the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management the authority to enter into

stewardship contracts with the public to achieve land management goals for national forests and public lands that meet local and rural community needs. A Collaborative Stewardship group has been formed for this project, and includes representatives from local tribes, state agencies, conservation organizations, and citizens. The proposed actions were developed in coordination with the Dungeness Collaborative Group.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

As required by the National Forest Management Act, this decision is consistent with the Olympic National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) as amended by the 1994 Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl, and its amendments, as well as its attached Standards and Guidelines.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

Currently there are three species of fish listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act within the Dungeness watershed- Chinook salmon, summer chum salmon, and bull trout. The planning area directly affects Chinook and bull trout spawning and rearing habitat. The National Marine Fisheries Services has designated all anadromous habitat accessible to Chinook as critical habitat, which extends up the Dungeness up to river mile (RM) 18.7. The watershed also provides habitat for northern spotted owls, marbled murrelets, and bald eagles which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The proposed action was assessed and found to be consistent with the 2003 – 2008 *Programmatic Biological Assessment for Selected Forest Management Activities, Olympic National Forest*, which addressed potential effects of projects on Federally listed threatened and endangered species. It was determined that this proposed project “May Affect, but is Not Likely to Adversely Affect” northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet, and designated critical habitat for northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet. This proposed project would have “No Effect” on bull trout, Puget Sound Chinook salmon, Hood Canal summer chum salmon, Puget Sound steelhead trout and bald eagle.

Survey and Manage Species. Survey and Manage species were assessed for this project as it related to the October 2006 court modification to the January 2006 injunction of the 2004 Record of Decision to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines in Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl. The court modification exempts thinning in stands younger than 80 years old from survey and regulatory requirements under the 2001 Record of Decision. For those exempted activities, the 2004 Record of Decision applies.

Surveys were not required for this project due to the age of vegetation proposed to be thinned, and species were evaluated as sensitive species where designated under the 2004 Record of Decision. A review of the most recent database for occurrences of Survey and Manage species, however, indicated that there were no known sites of Survey and Manage species in the project area. The project is determined to have “No Impacts” to Hoko vertigo (snail), Malone’s jumping slug, and “May Impact” individual Burrington’s jumping slug, warty jumping slug, blue-gray taildropper slug, and Puget Oregonian snail, but is not likely to contribute to a trend towards

federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

Sensitive Species. Potential effects of the proposed project on Regional Forester's Sensitive plant and animal species were evaluated. The commercial thinning unit was reviewed for likelihood of habitat of sensitive wildlife species and was determined that the project will have "No Impacts" to common loon, American peregrine falcon, and Mazama pocket gopher. The project "May Impact" individual Van Dyke's Salamander, Cope's giant salamander, and Olympic torrent salamander, Townsend's big-eared bat, and Pacific fisher, but is not likely to contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

Surveys for sensitive plants were conducted to determine if there were any special status plant, bryophyte, lichen or fungi species documented in the project area. Existing field records in addition to field surveys determined that there were no new occurrences. Therefore, there are no anticipated adverse effects to any of the listed sensitive amphibians, birds, mammals or plants.

Invasive Plants. Noxious weeds and other invasive plants may pose a serious threat to the health of National Forests. Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species (Feb. 1999), provides direction that "Federal agencies shall: (1) prevent the introduction of invasive species; (2) detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species in a cost-effective and environmentally sound manner; (3) monitor invasive species populations accurately and reliably; (4) provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded." No invasive plants were documented in the proposed thinning unit.

Cultural Resources. A cultural resource effects determination was prepared and submitted to the Washington State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) on March 9, 2007. Field surveys were conducted for the thinning area. No cultural resources were identified, and therefore, it was determined that there would be no impacts to cultural resources.

## **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This project will be implemented on or after August 6, 2007.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

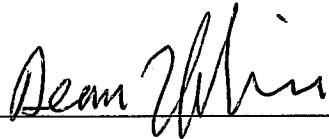
This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215, pursuant to the September 16, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. Any individual or organization who submitted comments during the comment period specified at 36 CFR.6 may appeal. Written notice of appeal must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer, Forest Supervisor Dale Hom, ATTN: Appeals, Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512 within 45 days of the date of publication of notice regarding this decision in the *Peninsula Daily News* (Port Angeles, WA). The appeal must state that the document is an appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215, and at a minimum must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the name and address of the appellant, and must identify the decision by title, subject, date of decision, and name of the Responsible Official. The appeal narrative must be sufficient to identify the specific change(s) to the decision sought by the appellant or portions

of the decision to which the appellant objects, and must state how the Responsible Official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided. If applicable, the appeal should state how the appellant believes this decision violates law, regulation, or policy.

Appeals (including attachments) may be filed by regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand delivery, express delivery, or messenger service. The publication date of the notice regarding this decision in the newspaper of record is the sole means of calculating the appeal filing deadline, and those wishing to appeal should not rely on dates or timelines from any other source. E-mail appeals must be submitted to: [appeals-pacificnorthwest-olympic@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-pacificnorthwest-olympic@fs.fed.us), and must be in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf) or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf). FAX appeals must be submitted to: 360-956-2330. Appeals may be hand-delivered to the Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512 between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM Monday-Friday.

### CONTACT PERSON

For further information concerning this project or decision, contact Susan Piper, Wildlife Program Manager, Olympic National Forest, 1835 Black Lake Blvd. SW, Suite A, Olympia, WA 98512, ph: 360-956-2435.



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Dean Yoshina

Hood Canal District Ranger

3/16/2007

Date

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