

Decision Memo
 Bridge Creek Danger Tree Abatement Project
 Ochoco National Forest
 Lookout Mountain Ranger District, Crook County, Oregon

Decision

The Bridge Creek Wildland Fire Use fire created numerous danger trees immediately adjacent to the 2630-450 and 2630-459 roads (approximately 5.5 miles in length), 30 miles north-east of Prineville, OR. These danger trees have the potential of reaching the road right-of way and are a potential hazard to Forest users and Forest Service personnel. I have decided to cut down all and commercially remove some of these danger trees. A site map is enclosed.

This decision will increase public safety by felling *Likely* or *Imminent* danger trees. This decision will allow for the harvest of merchantable danger trees in management allocations where removal is allowed.

A large number of non-merchantable (many < 8 inches diameter at breast height) danger trees will be felled and left in place.

No tree will be felled unless it meets the danger tree guidelines described below. Activity fuels will be piled and burned and/or lopped and scattered after danger tree felling operations are completed.

The following table summarizes information about the roads on which danger tree abatement will take place.

Forest Road	Road Type	Miles of Road	Access Point	Management Allocation
2630-450	Local	4.5	Indian Prairie/2630 road	General Forest
2630-459	Local	.7	2630-450 road	General Forest
Total		5.2 miles		

Trees have been evaluated and rated for danger levels and risk according to the guidelines in “Field Guide for Danger Tree Identification and Response (Field Guide)” by Toupin and Barger (2005). Guidelines of applicable Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) publications, the Oregon Occupation Safety and Health Code and “Oregon Guidelines for Selecting Reserve Trees” have also been used in the design of the project. The following is a summary of how the “Field Guide” defines a danger tree. The potential failure zone is defined as one ½-tree height (generally less than 150 feet) distance on the upslope and downslope sides of the road. Within this zone, all those trees with an imminent or likely potential for failure and where, if the trees falls it will in part

or entirely land within the road corridor, will be felled. Trees are defined as likely to fall if identified as having undermined root systems and/or the trees are dead but still sound. Trees defined as having imminent potential of failure are identified as missing bole wood due to fire or damage, having loose bark and/or are dead and not sound. Trees with an imminent or likely potential of failure on flat ground or below the road with a 10% or greater lean away from the road will remain standing. Trees with an imminent or likely potential of failure above the road, with a 10% or greater lean away from the road, and which do not pose a risk of rolling onto the road if they fall, will remain standing.

Project Design Criteria (elements that will be used during project design and implementation.):

Visual Quality

Applicable for all Foreground landscape areas

Activity fuels disposal for Foreground areas will be completed within two years.

Minimize ground disturbance in Foreground areas.

Slash clean up will be completed by a low impact techniques such as pile and burn and/or lop and scatter, except for landings, which will be machine piled.

Hydrology/Soils

Danger trees in Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) will be felled but not removed. No heavy equipment will be allowed in RHCAs. In addition, any activity fuels in riparian areas will be lopped and scattered.

Fell and leave trees that will cause excessive resource damage.

Clean out all small “floatable” pieces of wood in riparian areas within 200 feet of any roadside culverts.

Burn piles will be located at least 100 feet from intermittent channels and at least 50 feet from riparian vegetation.

Do not deck trees or create landings in RHCAs.

Use existing road and skid trail infrastructure where possible.

The implementation of a new skid trail will occur only where other harvest and yarding options are not viable or will cause unacceptable resource damage.

Newly designated skid trail parallel to the road corridor may be used if they will help reduce soil disturbance.

Yarding with rubber-tired skidders will occur only on existing or newly designated skid trails. Multiple passes of ground-based machinery will be allowed on existing or newly designated skid trails. Except on parallel skid trails, operate skidders only on slopes 25% or less.

Danger trees within riparian reserves and in other areas where excessive resource damage could occur from yarding operations will be hand-felled and left on site.

Machine traffic for piling of limbed material in these areas will not be allowed.

Piling, if needed, will be done by hand.

A soil scientist will be involved in parallel skid trail designation.

Cutting of hand-felled material to log length before machine yarding will be minimized to limit the number of machine trips. Larger trees that are too heavy to

be processed in one piece or too large in diameter to be grabbed by an articulating head of a log loader will be cut to log length in order to be yarded.

Logs accumulated and yarded to the primary roads are to be decked on or along the primary roadbed for loading onto haul trucks.

Do not remove existing down logs present on the forest floor.

Snags may be removed to reduce hazards to humans.

Specific RHCA Design Criteria

There are five total drainages that flow north across Forest Roads 450 and 459. The following are listed in order as you travel northeast up the two roads. No landings will be placed at or within 150 feet of these sites. Heavy equipment will not be driven across these channels. Hazard trees within the buffer zones will be felled by hand in random directions and left. All drainages will be flagged out.

Drainage 1: The stream is a class-5 channel that is flat and open. The channel does become more confined going downhill and all heavy equipment will be kept within 100 feet of the road to avoid any negative effects to the channel. Equipment will not enter within 30 feet of this part of the channel.

Drainage 2: The stream is a class-5 channel. Machines will be kept 30 feet from the center of the channel.

Drainage 3: Masterson Spring is at the third draw that crosses the 450 road within the burned area. There are two channels on the uphill side that connect below the road to form a class-3 and then class-2 stream. Masterson Spring emerges in the southwestern channel in a pothole on the uphill side of the road and then goes subsurface again until it emerges approximately 40 feet downhill of the road forming a stream. A 150-foot buffer will be used around the uphill spring to the road and then a 300-foot buffer will be used around the class-2 channel on the downhill side. A 30-foot buffer will be used on the northeastern class-4 channel on the uphill side and the 150-foot buffer will be used on it for the downhill side where it meets the main channel of Masterson Spring.

Drainage 4: No harvest proposed.

Drainage 5: The stream is a class-5 channel on the 450 road. Machines will be kept 30 feet from the center of the channel on each side of the road.

Botany

Use timber sale contact clauses to prevent the inadvertent introduction of invasive plant species by contractors.

Purpose and Need

The ***purpose*** of the project is to provide for public and employee safety. The area is now exposed to an elevated risk from numerous danger trees along these two roadways.

There is a ***need*** to reduce risk through the felling of danger trees.

There is also an ***opportunity*** for the utilization of danger trees as timber products from areas where management direction allows removal of felled trees.

Categorical Exclusion

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement when they are within one of the categories identified in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 30. Specifically, this project falls within category 31.12 (4). Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landlines.

Extraordinary Circumstances

To determine the appropriateness of using a categorical exclusion, in addition to fitting within a Category, a review of the potential impact to specific resource conditions in the project area as identified in FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3(2) is also necessary. The resource areas to be considered are floodplains, wetlands, municipal watersheds, congressionally designated areas (such as Wilderness), inventoried roadless areas, research natural areas, federally listed threatened and endangered species, sensitive species, and Native American religious or cultural sites. I have reviewed project effects to these resources (see discussion below) and have determined that the project, as designed, will have little to no effect relative to the natural or human environment and will not result in any extraordinary circumstances; therefore I am categorically excluding this project from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Information that is more detailed is in the specialist's reports on file at the Lookout Mountain Ranger District.

Wetlands, Floodplains, Municipal Watersheds

There are no anticipated effects to wetlands or floodplains because harvest activities within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs) are consistent with Riparian Management Objectives for RHCAs and the required project design criteria in the NMFS Fish Habitat Restoration Biological Opinion (April 28, 2007).

There will be no effect to municipal watersheds because there are no municipal watersheds within the project area or downstream of this project area.

Congressionally designated areas such as Wilderness, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and Research Natural Areas

There are no congressionally designated or proposed, Wilderness, Inventoried Roadless or Research Natural Areas within this project area. The Bridge Creek Wilderness area is adjacent to the project area to the southeast

Native American religious or cultural sites

During project review, no cultural sites were identified within the project area. If cultural sites are encountered during project implementation, project activities at the site will be discontinued and the Cultural Resources specialist will be consulted.

Federally Listed and Forest Service Sensitive species

Biological evaluations were prepared for terrestrial, aquatic, and botanical species. The three biological evaluations are contained in the project file. Regarding aquatic species, the proposed action will not significantly affect threatened or endangered species or their

critical habitat. The cutting and removal of hazard trees in these areas may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or loss of viability to sensitive species; will have No Effect on threatened bull trout and may effect but is likely to not adversely effect threatened Mid-Columbia River steelhead trout; and will have No Impact to essential fish habitat. There are no endangered aquatic species on the Ochoco National Forest. For sensitive terrestrial species, a finding of no impact has been made for all 13 species. Finally, a finding of No Impact has been made for all sensitive plants documented or suspected on the Ochoco National Forest.

Other areas of concern

I have considered the effect of removing large woody material (logs) from the project area and the potential impacts to cavity nesters and species dependent on down woody habitat. The wildfire has produced ample snag and down wood across the landscape. Even if one were to ignore the fact the project area is just a fraction of the area affected by the fire, the project area itself will provide large down wood. For instance, in some areas (RHCAs), danger trees will be felled and left in place. All existing large down logs, trees felled by the fire, trees felled as part of the fire suppression efforts, and trees felled as part of this project but lacking commercial value, will be left on site. In addition, because of the conservative marking of trees to be felled and removed (only trees with no live foliage), it is expected that additional large trees will become snags and down wood over the next ten years.

I have reviewed the potential impact of project activities as related to invasive plants. The risk and spread of invasive plants has been determined to be high using a standardized noxious weed risk assessment system. The risk is directly related to the use of heavy equipment during project implementation. I am confident that timber sale contract clauses (equipment washing, etc) will mitigate the potential importation of invasive plants into the project area.

Public Involvement

On October 24, 2008, the project proposal was provided to the public, other agencies, and tribes for comment. Three response letters were received. On December 9, 2008, the project proposal was again provided to the public, other agencies, and tribes for comment. Formal Notice was given in The Bulletin newspaper on December 11, 2008. The 30-day comment period ended on January 12, 2009. Only one letter, in support of the project, was received.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This project is consistent with the Forest Plan as amended by Pacfish; the Clean Water Act; Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management; Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands; and the Endangered Species Act.

Land and Resource Management Plan Direction

The project will meet Forest-wide standards and guidelines and Management Area standards and guidelines as described in the Ochoco National Forest Land and Resource

Management Plan (LRMP) as amended. Management allocations for the project area include:

- General Forest
- Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities/Implementation Date

Since only supportive comments were received during the comment period, this decision is not subject to appeal (36 CFR 215.12). Implementation may begin immediately.

Contact Person/Further Information

The Decision Memo documenting this decision is available for review at the Ochoco National Forest Headquarters and Lookout Mountain District Office, 3160 NE Third Street, Prineville, Oregon. Copies are available upon request. Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from Paul Cuddy at the above address, or by telephone at (541) 416-6500. The Decision Memo is also available on the internet at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/projects/units/crooked/index.shtml>.

WILLIAM QUEEN
District Ranger
Enclosure

Date