United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | R-1

Reply To: 1570 (215) Date: May 28, 1997

Subject: Alder-Bryant Timber Salvage Proposal, Appeal #97-01-00-0051
Beaverhead-Deerlodge NFs

To: Appeal Deciding Officer

This is my recommendation on disposition of the appeal filed by Sara Johnson on behalf of the Native Ecosystems Council protesting the Wise River District Ranger's Decision Notice (DN) for the Alder-Bryant Timber Salvage Proposal on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests.

The District Ranger's decision adopts Alternative 2. Implementation of this decision will salvage harvest approximately 301 acres, yielding about 1.5 MMBF of timber products; thin approximately 11 acres; build up to 0.4 miles of temporary road to be obliterated after the timber sale is completed; repair drainage problems on Bryant Creek and Calvert Mine roads, and require listed mitigation measures.

My review was conducted pursuant to, and in accordance with, 36 CFR 215.19 to ensure the analysis and decision are in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policy, and orders. The appeal record, including the Appellants' objections and recommended changes, has been thoroughly reviewed.

SUMMARY

The Appellants allege violations of the National Forest Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Appellants request the DN be remanded and a survey of management indicator species be completed; conservation strategies be developed; current accepted methodology be used; cumulative impacts on elk summer habitat and goshawk nesting habitat be completed; ensure that public issues are addressed in the range of alternatives; and if a NEPA decision has already been made that no elk security will be provided in the roaded portion of this decision, this decision document needs to be cited.

An informal meeting was held, but no resolution was reached. No interested party comments were received.

FINDINGS

My recommendation is based upon the following evaluation:

Clarity of the Decision and Rationale

The decision is clearly stated early in the DN. However, the purpose and need for the project are included under the category "Decision and Reasons for the Decision." The decision document would have been clarified and strengthened by inclusion of a separate purpose and need section stating how the selected alternative addresses the purpose and need.

All mitigation, design and monitoring requirements are clearly incorporated into the decision. Inclusion of a proximity map and a map of the selected alternative in the DN would have helped the reader understand the project and the location of units.

I conclude the DN is adequate and the decision clearly stated.

Purpose of the Proposal and Comprehension of Benefits

The purpose and need for the action are clearly stated in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and are specific to the project area. Forest Plan goals are clearly displayed in Chapter 3 of the EA. However, a discussion of the purpose and need in relationship to Forest Plan goals would have clarified the DN.

The consequences of the no-action alternative are clearly stated in the DN. The no-action alternative was given full consideration throughout the DN and EA.

The reasons for the decision are clearly stated. The rationale for eliminating alternatives not considered in detail is explained in the DN, but the document would have been improved by a discussion of how the selected alternative responds to public comment.

I find the decision documentation supports the need for, and the benefits of, the proposed action.

Consistency with Policy, Direction, and Supporting Information

The decision is consistent with Forest Plan standards, guidelines, and goals and with management area direction.

Ecosystem management principles were used in development of the purpose and need and design of the project and also were addressed in the no-action alternative.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is clear and supported by information in the EA. The FONSI does not specifically address mitigation, but mitigation is addressed in the DN and the EA.

I conclude the proposed project complies with all legal and regulatory requirements, as well as current Forest Service policy.

Effectiveness of Public Participation Activities and Use of Comments

Public involvement was very thorough. A scoping and public involvement plan was prepared early in the process and updated periodically.

Comments obtained from scoping were used in issue identification and development. Issues raised by the public were analyzed and considered. However, the documentation would have been improved by more closely tracking those issues.

The Responsible Official considered public comment in alternative selection. An alternative of dropping units 1 and 2 was suggested during the informal resolution meeting. However, the Responsible Official determined that mitigation measures and project design satisfactorily addressed all issues, so there was no reason to develop and analyze this alternative.

All written comments received individual responses. The responses were thoughtful and positive and were grounded in the specialists' analyses. Some comments were used to clarify wording in the EA.

Overall, the Responsible Official did a very thorough job of involving the public and ensuring they had ample opportunity to participate in the decisionmaking process.

I conclude the public participation process was excellent.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend the District Ranger's decision be affirmed and the Appellants' requested relief be denied.

/s/ Katherine Q. Solberg

KATHERINE Q. SOLBERG
Reviewing Officer
Director, Human Resource