



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service



Williams Creek Fire Salvage Timber Sale

Decision Memo

Umpqua National Forest

North Umpqua Ranger District

June 2010



INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION

The Williams Creek Fire burned 9,487 acres in 2009 of mostly forested land on the North Umpqua Ranger District, Umpqua National Forest, located in Douglas County, Oregon. Approximately 1,000 acres of both private and BLM land were also affected by the fire. Over 93 percent of the burned area is within the Middle North Umpqua 5th-field watershed with approximately 600 acres that also burned in the Canton and Rock Creek/North Umpqua watersheds.

The fire burned extensive acres of both Late Successional Reserves (7,572 acres) and the Williams Creek Inventoried Roadless Area (5,572 acres). Approximately 700 acres of Matrix lands on the Forest are also within the fire perimeter. Matrix lands include federal lands outside of reserves, withdrawn areas, Managed Late-Successional Areas, and Adaptive Management Areas. All proposed salvage would occur on Matrix lands. The fire started on July 28, 2009 and was controlled by October 2, 2009. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

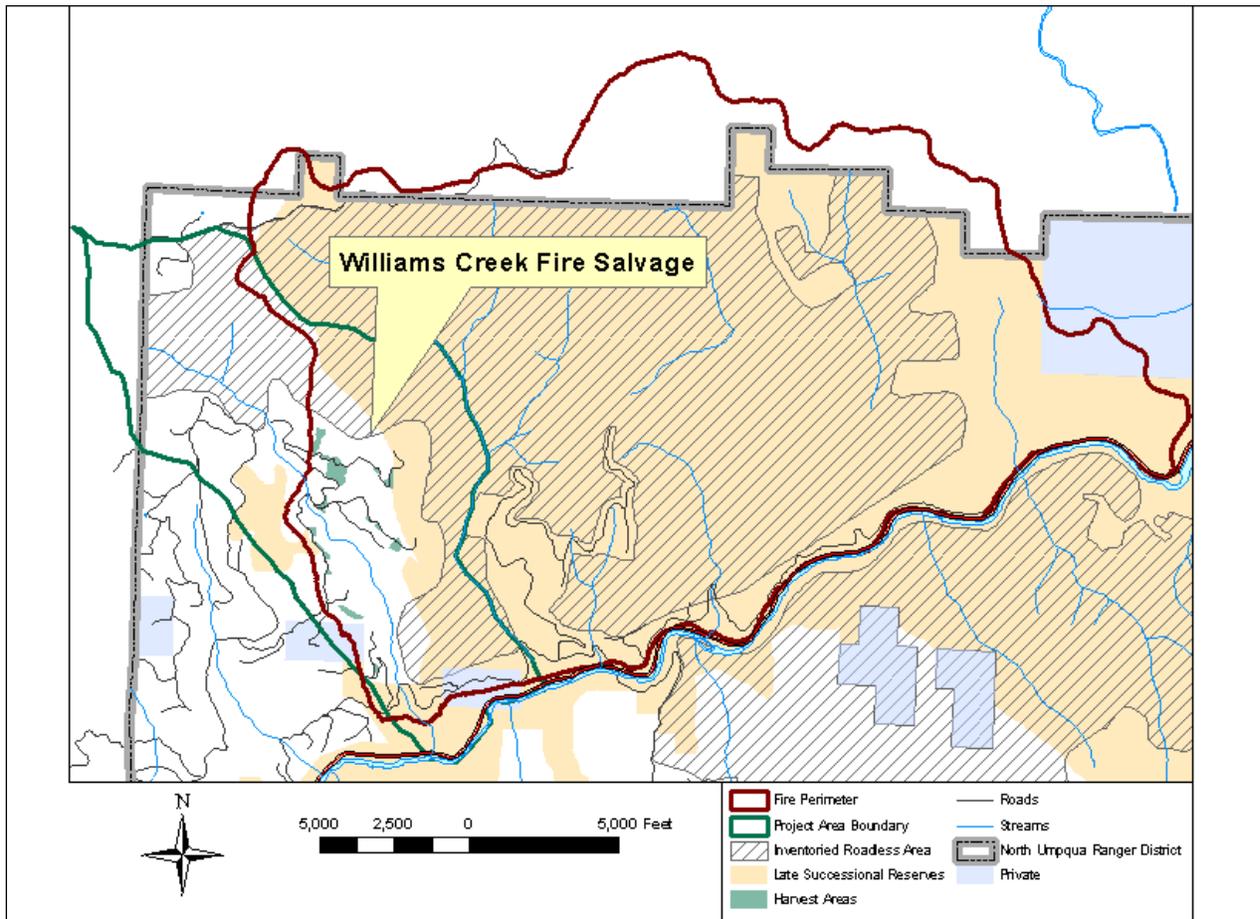
The Williams Creek Fire Salvage project is located within the far western end of the Williams Creek Fire perimeter near Fall Creek in the Middle North Umpqua Watershed. The proposed harvest is located in T26S, R01W, Sections 5 and 8 along Forest Service roads 4710-050, 095 and 446. Most of the project area burned with a low to moderate intensity mosaic pattern leaving many live trees interspersed with dead and dying trees. The proposed harvest focuses on the higher intensity areas within the mosaic where small patches of trees were killed. This pattern is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Mosaic fire burn pattern. Units include higher intensity burned areas.



Figure 2 shows the fire perimeter in relation to the Late Successional Reserves, Williams Creek Inventoried Roadless Area, and the North Umpqua River. The proposed salvage harvest is located within the western portion of the fire perimeter. There is also a smaller Late Successional Reserve to the west of the harvest area that was not part of the fire.

Figure 2. Fire perimeter in relation to proposed harvest and land use designations.



PURPOSE AND NEED, PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose and need for the project is to recover both the economic and fiber value of trees killed as a result of the Williams Creek Fire 2009; to contribute wood products to the local economy; and to provide jobs within the county and state in a manner consistent with the 1990 Umpqua Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), as amended. Page B-9 of the Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan, 1994 states "In the Matrix, objectives for management after stand-replacing events will generally differ from those for Late Successional Reserves. Economic benefits of timber production will receive greater consideration. For example, the commercial salvage of dead trees will be less constrained, and replanting disturbed areas will be a high priority" (USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management, 1994).

The proposed action includes the following:

HARVEST AND FUEL TREATMENTS

- Commercially salvage harvest dead and dying trees from approximately 38 acres distributed across 13 units. Harvest would incorporate both skyline and ground-based logging systems on land designated Matrix in the Northwest Forest Plan.¹
- Commercial harvest of roadside hazard trees felled during road maintenance and hazard tree felling immediately post-fire on Matrix lands between units on approximately 2 acres.
- Treating activity-created fuels on roadside hazard tree salvage areas by underburning, crushing, machine piling, pruning/chipping, or handpile burning.

ROADS

- No new road construction or winter haul outside of the normal operating season would occur.
- Maintain about 10 miles of existing system² roads. This work would be done by timber sale purchasers using a variety of equipment such as a road grader, dump truck, backhoe, and a water truck. Road maintenance would include:
 - Logging out (removing downed trees, large rocks, slides etc.) from roads;
 - Brushing roads and road sides;
 - Blading road beds, including ditches where needed;
 - Cleaning existing culverts at ditch relief and stream crossing locations as needed for proper drainage;
 - Constructing water bars on some existing system roads as needed for proper drainage;
 - Applying water for dust abatement; and
 - Hazard tree felling to meet OSHA requirements.

¹ Matrix lands include federal lands outside of reserves, withdrawn areas, Managed Late-Successional Areas, and Adaptive Management Areas.

² System roads are constructed or maintained for long-term use. They can be open for use or closed depending on their maintenance level and the original objective for which the road was built.

VEGETATION AND SOILS

- Reforestation of Douglas-fir, incense-cedar and sugar pine on 11 acres in Unit 9 where fire killed the majority of trees in the unit and residual seed sources are inadequate to provide natural regeneration in a timely manner.
- Reforestation of widely-spaced sugar pine (40 trees/per acre) on approximately 15 additional acres where commercial salvage creates openings larger than 0.5 acres to help re-establish this species within its habitat region.
- Treat noxious weeds on an estimated 4 acres to prevent spread of non-native invasive plants.
- Sub-soil all ground-based skid trails to prevent possible compaction and erosion.
- Scarify and seed approximately 4 acres of skid trails in units 2 and 10 to reduce potential erosion and promptly re-vegetate the area.

WILDLIFE

- Retain all snags and down wood that pre-dates the fire wherever possible.
- Create up to 5 snags per acre in the next several years where existing snags are absent in sufficient quantity to provide adequate wildlife habitat needs. Many trees will not be harvested that do not meet the criteria for harvest. Some of these are likely to die in the next several years and provide additional snags. Where the number of existing snags retained in the unit and where mortality in the residual trees is not sufficient to meet wildlife habitat needs, snags will be created.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

I have decided to proceed with the project described above. The commercial harvest of dead and dying timber resulting from the fire will allow for recovery of the wood value in these trees and help provide a sustainable level of wood volume from federal lands important to local and regional timber mills. The availability of a continued supply of wood will help maintain adequate manufacturing of wood products that are vital to the local economy and provide for a portion of salary-wage employment in Douglas County.

The Williams Creek Fire burned over 9,400 acres in and adjacent to the project area. The vast majority of the burned area (8,029 acres) is within Late Successional Reserves and/or the Williams Inventoried Roadless Area that will not be harvested. There are only 541 acres within the Matrix land designation that allows for commercial harvest. In addition there are over 7.8 miles of streams in riparian reserves within the Matrix lands that will not be harvested. These protected areas within the Williams Creek Fire area provide large amounts of snags and coarse wood that will continue to provide habitat into the future.

Within the salvage harvest areas, retention of snags and coarse down wood that pre-dated the fire will add to the habitat needs. The evaluation criteria used to determine which trees will likely

die in the next several years (and thus be harvested) is likely conservative based on monitoring from post fire plots.³ Although expected additional mortality varies by the successive year's moisture conditions, the criteria usually underestimate mortality by approximately 15 percent, indicating that many of these injured trees are likely to become snags and down wood in the next 1 to 2 years.

I have reviewed the Northwest Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management, 1994), Umpqua Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA Forest Service, 1990), and specialist reports on the Williams Creek Fire Salvage Project. With the implementation of Best Management Practices including no harvest buffer widths of at least one site-potential tree on all riparian reserves, no harvest areas around sensitive soils, and retention of pre-existing snags and coarse wood, I believe salvage of the wood within the project area will not cause substantial negative impacts to the environment. All of these programmatic documents allow for the harvest of the dead and dying timber to help meet the purpose and need for the project.

I have considered the potential of further harvest within the watershed of hazard tree felling not associated with this project. An Environmental Analysis is currently being done on the Umpqua National Forest to establish protocol for determination of when commercial harvest of danger trees felled along roads may be implemented, or whether the down trees shall be used for habitat purposes. This protocol will examine trees on a site specific basis taking into account the land use designation for the area and additional site specific impacts in that determination. Due to the size, scale and duration of the Williams Creek Salvage timber sale and the further examination of the downed hazard trees in the future, I do not anticipate any cumulative effects from implementation of this project.

FINDINGS AS REQUIRED BY LAW, POLICY AND REGULATION

Finding of Consistency with Applicable Forest Service Management Direction and the National Forest Management Act

I, Carol Cushing, District Ranger for the North Umpqua Ranger District, am the Responsible Official for this project. Based on my review of the interdisciplinary analysis for the Williams Creek Fire Salvage timber sale, I find that the project is consistent with the Standards and Guidelines of the Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan and is therefore consistent with the National Forest Management Act. This finding includes all of the following determinations documented in the specialists' reports for this project:

- This project would not prevent attainment of the goals and objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.

³ Personal communication, Don Goheen, Pathologist, Entomologist, Southwest Oregon Insect & Disease Service Center, USFS.

- It is consistent with all of the Standards and Guidelines in the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, as amended and the 1990 Umpqua National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended.

Therefore, I find that the Williams Creek Fire Salvage Timber Sale is consistent with all applicable Forest Service management direction.

Finding of Consistency with State Historic Preservation Office Policies

Surveys were completed by the Forest Archeologist within the Williams Creek Fire Salvage project. All recommendations to protect cultural and historic resources are incorporated within the project. Implementation of these measures will result in the project being consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act. Following project activities, resource monitoring will occur to assure that resources were not impacted by timber salvage implementation.

Finding of Non-Jeopardy to Endangered, Threatened or Sensitive Species and No Adverse Effect to Species Covered Under the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act

The project Fish Biologist has determined that this project would have no effect on listed or special status species. Listed salmon are not present in the project area due to the lack of adult and juvenile passage at the Highway 138 stream crossing. Potential effects of the action were determined to have no adverse effect for Oregon Coast Coho (*O. kisutch*) and Oregon Coast Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) because EFH is not present in Fall Creek. There is no anticipated incidental take associated with the proposed project actions. The project is expected to maintain and not retard or prevent the attainment of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy objectives.

During the planning of the Williams Creek Fire Salvage Project, guidance to complete additional surveys for some rare and uncommon species was received; these surveys were conducted and completed to protocol. One fungus (*Sparassis crispa*) was found at the edge of a proposed unit. The boundary was adjusted to exclude this fungus. No other species of concern were found in the area and no additional buffers were prescribed.

The project Botanist has determined that this project would have no effect on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat, and no impact on Survey and Manage species. This project does not impact individuals or their habitat, and would not contribute towards a Federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species on the R6 Regional Forester's sensitive species list.

The Wildlife Biologist has determined that this project is not likely to adversely affect threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat. For R6 Regional Forester's sensitive species or Management Indicator Species listed in the Umpqua National Forest Land Management Plan (USDA Forest Service, 1990), the project is expected to either have no impact or may impact some species' individuals or habitat but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

Based on the fisheries, wildlife, and botanical input, I find that the Williams Creek Fire Salvage timber sale is not likely to adversely affect any endangered, threatened or sensitive species.

Finding of the Absence of Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

Scoping to determine the presence or absence of potential effects on extraordinary circumstances occurred in the January 2010 Umpqua National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions. A scoping letter was mailed to 89 people, organizations, companies and agencies that have expressed interest in timber sale related projects in the past on the North Umpqua Ranger District. Ten responses to scoping were received via letter, email, and phone.

Comments were summarized and reviewed by the interdisciplinary team and me. Some responses to comments were issued to clarify the proposed action and alleviate some concerns. A representative of Douglas County requested cooperating agency status on the project and he has been kept informed of the planning throughout. I also met with a local landowner and neighbor to the project who is a well-respected conservationist for activities on the district to discuss the project.

Based on my review of the interdisciplinary analysis and the input I have received from the public through the District Rangers interactions, I find that this project does not adversely affect any of the extraordinary circumstances listed in 1909.15, 30.3(2). Specifically, I find that this project does not adversely affect: (a) endangered or threatened species or their critical habitats, or any Forest Service sensitive species; (b) floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds, as protection measures would still continue within the watershed to ensure that drinking water was adequately protected; (c) Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness or National Recreation Areas; (d) inventoried roadless areas; (e) Research Natural Areas; (f) and Native American religious or cultural sites, or archaeological or historic properties and sites, as these areas will be protected from harvest activities to insure preservation of the sites.

Finding of Consistency with All Applicable Federal Laws and Regulations

This project would not preclude consideration of the Williams Creek Inventoried Roadless area from future wilderness consideration and thus meets the requirements of the Wilderness Act, 1964 (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 71.1 (Parts 1 and 3)). The inventoried roadless area is over 6,100 acres meeting the minimum 5,000-acre requirement for wilderness consideration without the need for additional unroaded areas beyond the roadless boundary.

The unroaded area between existing roads and the inventoried roadless area consists of approximately 461 acres of Matrix lands. Approximately 28 acres would receive some salvage harvest with no new road construction and 11 acres would be isolated from the remaining roadless area. This area is not considered an important unroaded habitat area due to its proximity to roads, nor will it affect the adjoining inventoried roadless area for consideration as potential wilderness in the future.

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project and all applicable specialists' reports, I find that the project is consistent with the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Forest Management Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act. Therefore, I find that the Williams Creek Fire Salvage timber sale is consistent with applicable Federal laws and regulations.

Finding of Exclusion from Further National Environmental Policy Act Analysis

Based on my review of (1) the actions associated with this project; (2) the lack of environmental consequences documented in the interdisciplinary analysis; (3) the consistency of this project

with applicable laws, regulations, and management direction; (4) the non-jeopardy to endangered or threatened species or heritage resources; and (5) the absence of adverse effects to extraordinary circumstances; I find that this project is not significant in either context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27) and that no extraordinary circumstances would be adversely affected with this action (FSH 1909.15). I also find that this project will produce no substantial adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively, on the physical, biological, or social components of the human environment.

I have reviewed the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions in the area, including the activities that may contribute to cumulative effects. I do not believe that the Williams Creek Fire Salvage timber sale would contribute to adverse cumulative effects on the physical, biological, or social components of the human environment.

Therefore, I find that the Williams Creek Fire Salvage timber sale is categorically excluded from analysis in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (40 CFR 1508.4 and FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.3, Part 2) and that the category of exclusion is Category 13 as identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 31.2(13) based on the proposed activities of less than 250 acres of salvage harvest with less than ½ mile of road building and as codified at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(13).

Project Implementation

This decision shall be implemented in accordance with Forest Service regulations contained in 36 CFR, Part 215.8. I intend to implement the proposed activities effective immediately so as to obtain the highest value of the wood, and to minimize additional loss of wood value due to deterioration from insects and decay.

Minor changes may be needed during implementation to better meet on-site resource management and protection objectives. In determining whether and what kind of further NEPA action is required based on any such changes, I will consider whether the proposed change(s) is a substantial change to the intent of the decision as planned and already approved, and whether the change is relevant to environmental concerns. Connected or interrelated proposed changes regarding particular areas or specific activities will be considered together in making this determination. The cumulative impacts of these changes will also be considered.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this project, contact Lisa Winn, Interdisciplinary Team Leader/District Silviculturist; (541) 767-5040; email address lwinn@fs.fed.us.

Signature and Date

/s/ Carol Cushing

Carol Cushing
District Ranger,
North Umpqua Ranger District
Umpqua National Forest

June 29, 2010

Date Signed