

FAQs/Questions and Answers

Pacific Northwest Region – Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest

Topic: Chetco Bar Fire Area Salvage and Roadside Danger Tree Projects

Date: April 16, 2018

Background: The Chetco Bar Fire had significant impacts on Southwestern Oregon communities and ecosystems. The Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. is making a concerted effort to help these communities recover economically, while considering resource values and mitigating impacts caused by a fire that burned more than 191,000 acres.

Many of our employees not only participated in protecting communities from the Chetco Bar Fire, but have also been involved with completing the dangerous work of ensuring burned areas are safe from hazards such as falling trees, rolling debris, smoldering root wads and failing roads. While mitigating these dangers, every effort was made to provide public access when possible, and area and road closures were often reduced or rescinded even before the fire was contained.

In a November 16, 2017, letter to all Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. employees, former Forest Supervisor Rob MacWhorter urged employees to expeditiously address hazards to the public, meet long-term restoration needs and support local communities. “Completion of this work will be the highest priority work on the forest and requires an ‘all hands on deck’ approach similar to an emergency response,” MacWhorter wrote.

Current efforts involve Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. employees and other agency employees drawn from several national forests striving to provide balanced resource management and facilitate the harvest of fire-killed trees before they rot and become unsuitable for processing at local lumber mills.

A Restoration Strategy is currently being developed that will identify a long-term strategy for the entire Chetco Bar fire footprint. The forest has been allocated an additional 3.3 million dollars of funding to repair federally owned infrastructure such as roads, bridges, trails and recreation sites.

Questions and Answers:

How many board feet of timber would be available through the Chetco Bar Fire Salvage Project?

Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. managers estimate that approximately 70 million board feet would be harvested under the proposal. The forest began its focus on salvage efforts within approximately 13,000 acres of matrix land that experienced 50 to 100 percent canopy cover loss.

Matrix lands are where the majority of timber harvests should occur, according to the 1989 Siskiyou and 1990 Rogue River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans. A number of areas within the 13,000 acres of matrix are not proposed to have timber harvests because they are in inventoried roadless areas, in riparian areas, lack economically viable products or require wildlife habitat considerations. **In the interest of salvaging what timber we can in a timely manner, we chose to subtract these areas from the matrix lands, further refining the proposed salvage acreage to 4,090 acres.**

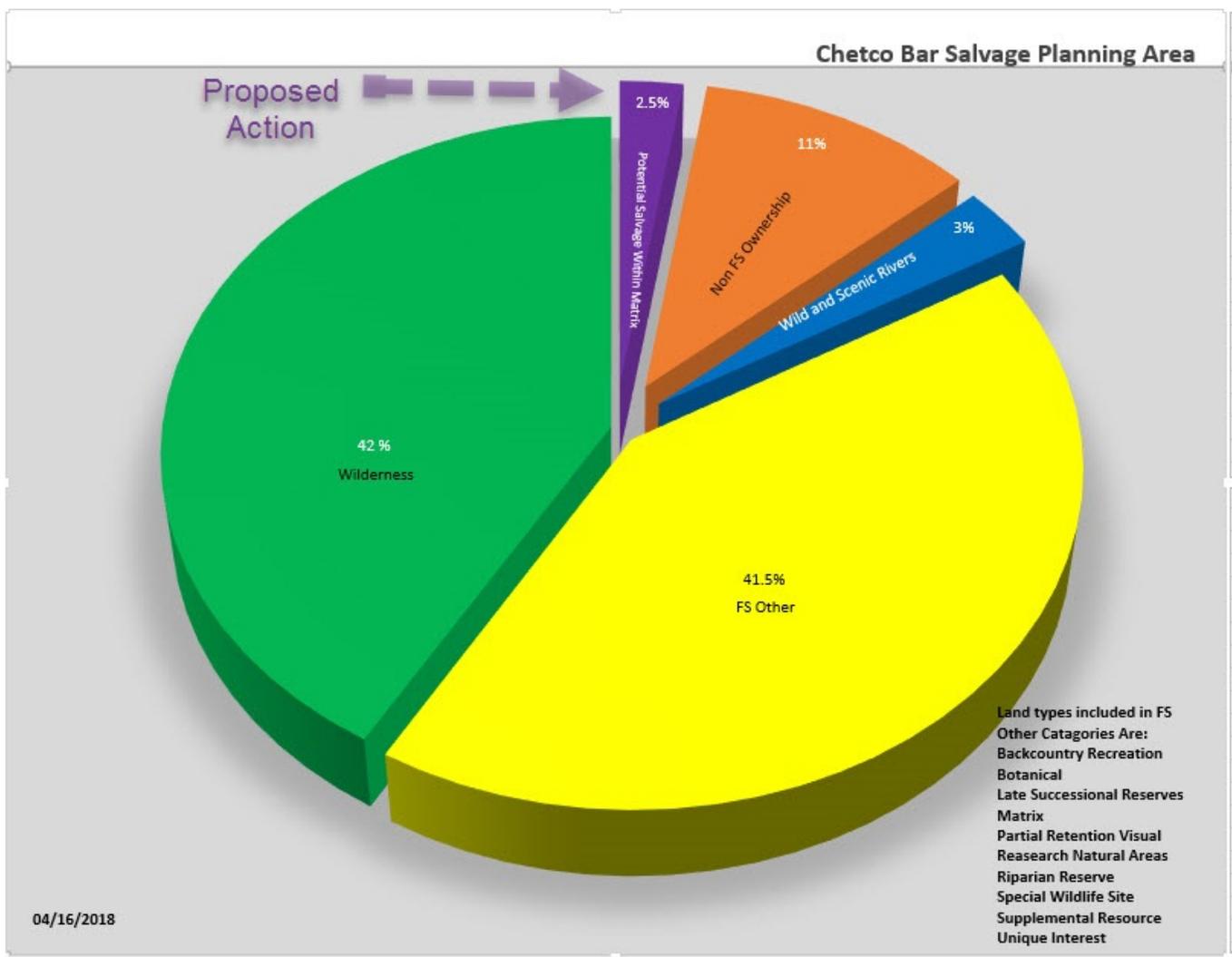
Predicting precisely how many board feet would be harvested is difficult because the project proposes harvesting fire-killed trees of all size classes. As an example, we could lose potential volume quickly in the smaller size classes, so depending on deterioration, we may not capture as much timber volume as we anticipate.



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Why is the Forest Service proposing to salvage only 2.5% percent of the Chetco Bar Fire area?

There are a number of reasons that we are proposing to salvage only 2.5% of the Chetco Bar Fire area. To provide context to the rationale behind our proposal, it is important to note that 61% of the fire footprint was either untouched by the fire or burned at a low intensity, where fire tends to benefit the health and vigor of the landscape. Conversely, 39% of the fire footprint burned at a moderate to high intensity. Within these areas, it was necessary to look at land allocations under our forest management plans that defined 1) areas that are suitable for harvest (matrix) and 2) areas that need to be evaluated for feasibility, such as riparian reserves, roadless areas or areas that do not lend themselves to logging systems operability and accessibility. **Considering these limitations, and in order to capture the value of trees that could be harvested in a timely manner, our proposed area has been refined to 2.5% of the Chetco Bar Fire footprint.**



Why is the Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. considering salvage timber harvests when ecosystems are already stressed by wildfires?

Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. managers hope salvaging some of these fire-killed trees will help local communities recover economically, while helping fund post-fire recovery efforts like tree planting that can foster resilient forest conditions, while contributing to future timber production.

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About 25,000 acres of land designated as “matrix” burned in the Chetco Bar Fire. Under the Northwest Forest Plan, matrix areas allow timber harvests and other forest management activities to occur. In matrix, economic benefits of timber production receive greater consideration. The management objectives of matrix points to the need for harvesting timber. Subsequently, it is important to salvage timber and reset timber production for future harvest opportunities. This timber would be harvested capturing the economic value that was intended to be sustainably and evenly harvested over time in matrix.

The Chetco Bar Fire Salvage Project interdisciplinary team worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine what effect the project would have on the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet. The team also worked closely with the National Marine Fisheries Service to examine Coho salmon effects.

Why does the Forest Service need to plant trees? Won't trees naturally regenerate?

Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. managers expect natural tree regeneration in most burned areas. The intent is to rely on natural regeneration whenever possible, but some large areas have no remaining conifer seeds sources available within seed dispersal distances. Hardwoods like tanoak, Pacific madrone, alder and big leaf maple are already sprouting. Without tree planting, large areas could convert from conifer to hardwood stands. Planting conifers would also be an important strategy to promote tree species diversity if sudden oak death becomes widespread within Chetco River drainage hardwood stands. As needed, site-specific tree species mix would be planted by hand.

How will fire-killed trees be harvested and hauled to lumber mills?

Fire-killed tree harvests would be conducted through a variety of harvest techniques that include: mechanized harvesting on gentle to moderate slopes and hand-felling of trees on steep slopes; ground-based skidding on gentle to moderate slopes; skyline (cable) yarding on steep slopes; helicopter logging in areas without road access; and construction of short, new temporary roads, when resource values have been considered or impacts mitigated.

Would roads be constructed for the Chetco Bar Fire Salvage Project/Roadside Danger Tree Projects?

The proposal would include utilizing existing national forest system roads and constructing temporary roads when resource values have been considered and impacts mitigated. Road reconstruction would occur on the existing transportation network specific to the roadside danger tree project. This work would include roadside brushing, grading, ditch cleaning, culvert replacement, surface rock replacement, fill repair, bridgework and infrastructure repair.

Who will sign the decision regarding how much timber will be harvested, after Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. Supervisor Rob MacWhorter retires?

The incoming Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. Supervisor is expected to sign the decision in early June 2018 as the responsible U.S. Forest Service official for the Chetco Bar Fire Area Salvage Project.

Has an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) been granted to expedite Chetco Bar Area Salvage Project work?

Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. managers requested an ESD from the Chief of the Forest Service for the Chetco Bar Fire Area Salvage Project so fire-killed timber can be harvested before it rots and loses its economic

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value. An ESD is a procedure used for an environmental analysis or environmental impact statement to expedite planning efforts. No decision has been made on the ESD request to the Chief as of April 10, 2018.

Much of the 1987 Silver, 2002 Biscuit and 2017 Chetco Bar Fires burned in the same footprint. How much timber was salvaged subsequent to the Silver and Biscuit Fires?

This is difficult to assess because many timber records are only available on microfiche and the Silver and Biscuit Fires occurred before the Siskiyou and Rogue River National Forests were combined. Records do show 159 million board feet of timber were offered for sale from 2004-07 on the Siskiyou N.F. It is not clear how much of this timber was fire-killed trees. Forest Service employees were likely busy preparing fire-killed timber from the 2002 Biscuit Fire for sale in 2003 because only 9.7 million board feet was offered that year.

What is the status of roadside danger tree mitigation on the Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F.?

About 234,500 acres burned last summer on the national forest, with four of the five ranger districts experiencing large fires. Danger tree abatement work is planned for the Chetco Bar, Abney, Blanket and Pup Fires. There were more than 250 miles of Forest Service roads within the Chetco Bar Fire perimeter listed on the Motor Vehicle Use Map as open for motor vehicle use. About 115 road miles remained temporarily closed this winter because of danger trees, steep slopes, poor road conditions and other post-fire hazards. **Inclement weather has delayed site preparation, but the first danger tree contract is scheduled for advertisement in the coming weeks, with an estimated volume of 9.1 million board feet.**

How far off roads will danger tree work occur?

Generally, 1.5 times the height of the danger tree. That distance is increased or decreased depending on factors that include slope, tree lean and whether or not a tree is above or below a road. Trees that were not killed outright by the fire will be assessed for their failure potential and those that present a danger will be felled.

Will danger trees in riparian areas be felled?

Some dead trees in riparian areas near roads will be dropped because they are still danger trees and pose safety concerns. Most of these trees are expected to be left on the ground as downed wood. The exception would be some trees that are felled on roads and need to be removed to keep the road open and some trees on road fill slopes, cut-banks, and around culvert inlets will be removed.

What is the legal authority being used for the Chetco Bar Fire Roadside Danger Project?

The legal authority to address danger trees along roads in the Chetco Bar Fire area and award contracts is the use of a Roadside Maintenance Categorical Exclusion (36 CFR 220.6, d and e). The emphasis is public safety on roads and clearing the roads so people can access the forest. A categorical exclusion would not require an emergency situation determination.

The roadside danger tree interdisciplinary team is working on consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Some of the roadside danger tree mitigation work is tied to Section 7 (d) of the Endangered Species Act, which allows some danger/hazard tree removal to occur prior to completion of consultation. The USFWS allows this provision because it recognizes the urgency from a public safety perspective for removing danger and hazard trees along roads and recreation sites caused by the 2017 fires.

What is the general plan regarding roadside danger trees associated with the Chetco Bar Fire?

Within the Chetco Bar fire perimeter, there are 251 miles of Forest Service roads that are available to public motorized use under the current Motor Vehicle Use Map. Work has been completed to remove imminent danger trees using emergency authorizations to reopen public access along a high use corridor that accesses

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private property/residences and popular river access. An updated road and area closure opens 62% of the previously closed roads and reduces the closure area by 65% to 34,000 acres.

The reopened roads and areas were deemed to be a lower risk to public safety based on the public's exposure to danger trees. This could be due to exposure/traffic levels or the area burned in a low severity fire where most trees are still alive. Signs are being placed in these areas to make the public aware that they are entering a post-fire environment with higher exposure to hazards.

A total of 115 miles of Forest Service roads remain closed, due to high severity fire effects and large amounts of danger trees, steep slopes, and other post-fire hazards identified by the Burned Area Emergency Response assessment team. These closed areas will be the focus for the first of several contracts to remove danger trees, and reopen the roads when the risk has been mitigated. Contracts to remove danger trees will cover the majority of the 251 miles of open roads, while some low fire severity areas are being considered for firewood cutting areas to mitigate danger trees. The first of these contracts is expected to be awarded in the coming weeks. The first high priority road systems for treatment include the 1917, 1909, 1376, 1107, 1983 and 1407 road systems.

What is the difference between a hazard tree and a danger tree?

A hazard tree is a dead tree or tree with damage or defect that could potentially fail within a recreation site (like a campground or trailhead), where the human exposure to danger is relatively high. A danger tree is a dead tree or tree with damage that could potentially fail on a forest road, where the human exposure tends to be more intermittent.

Will some timber from the Chetco Bar Fire Roadside Danger Tree Project be processed at mills?

Yes, however, the emphasis is on roadside public safety and clearing the roads so people can access the forest. There is a desire to recover marketable value from some roadside danger trees before they rot and are unsuitable for processing by lumber mills. Rogue River-Siskiyou N.F. managers intend to have timber sale contracts ready this spring to begin removal of roadside danger trees. But, the emphasis is getting the trees safely onto the ground and not on processing them at lumber mills. There is no diameter limit for these danger trees. Although the local mill is busy with private landowner salvage activities, the Forest Service proposed salvage and danger tree projects are not anticipated to stretch the mill beyond capacity.

Is there a lack of seedlings available for reforestation on National Forest System lands?

No, when reforestation needs are identified, seedlings can be provided by the J. Herbert Stone Nursery located in Central Point. Typically we have stored seed, but it would need to be sown. This takes 1-3 years depending on the type of planting stock wanted.

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