

**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** May 11, 2018

Dear Reader,

The High Cascades Ranger District is planning landscape restoration opportunities in the Stella project area. This area is located north of the town of Prospect, east of the Rogue-Umpqua Divide Wilderness, and south of Rabbit Ears. The Stella project area is approximately 60,000 acres, located mostly in Jackson County, and named after Mount Stella which is located in the northern portion of the project area. Elevations in the project area range from 2500 feet to 6300 feet. There is also about 4,000 acres of the Tiller Ranger District of the Umpqua National Forest included in the project area, located in the Huckleberry Special Interested Area. Only non-commercial activities are planned on the Umpqua.

The project area is home to incredible biodiversity from Ponderosa pine flats to slopes with mixed conifer and hardwoods. There are many streams within the project area, and the area also includes the Scenic section of the Wild and Scenic designated Upper Rogue River. There are many recreation opportunities within the project area, including hunting, fishing, OHV trails, non-motorized trails, and both dispersed and developed recreation camping opportunities. The entire project area is designated critical habitat for the northern spotted owl.

The Purpose and Need for this project includes the need to restore forest resiliency by reestablishing forest structure and pattern, vegetation composition and diversity, and riparian communities to conditions that are more resilient to natural disturbance processes. Comparison of the existing with the desired condition indicates the specific needs to:

- Reduce risk of habitat degradation and loss from uncharacteristic wildfire and/or insect and disease outbreak. Maintain and improve habitat for fish and wildlife species. Sustain and enhance northern spotted owl habitat to contribute to recovery.
- Restore forest structure, composition, and density toward more resistant and resilient vegetative conditions given the inherent soil characteristics and historic disturbance regimes. Protect and release legacy trees from competition.
- Restore degraded physical and biological stream processes that sustain aquatic ecosystem structure, function, and diversity.
- Conserve and restore culturally significant plants, and maintain habitat for rare plant populations.
- Provide for a variety of social and cultural values and opportunities.
- Contribute to the Forest probable sale quantity target.
- Restore and provide an adequate transportation system.

The proposed action was developed to respond to this purpose and need. The purpose and need comes from goals outlined in the Rogue River Land and Resource Management Plan.



The combination of these activities provide for a more resilient and fire-adapted ecosystem. By reducing the overall landscape wildfire risk, the ability to protect areas of structurally complex forest that provide important wildlife habitat such as northern spotted owl nesting, roosting, and foraging (NRF) and big game hiding cover will be improved. Wildlife habitat will also be enhanced by increasing individual tree growth in areas that can provide future NRF, and providing better big game forage in meadow enhancements. Safe and effective wildfire response will be aided by reducing fire intensities and the flexibility of using recently treated areas for suppression as well as clearer routes for public evacuation by road. Forested habitats containing large trees that draw people to the area will be protected by reducing the risk of large fires. Recreational opportunities will be maintained into the future. Finally, wood products removed in these treatments will provide timber, firewood and other forest products to the local and regional economies.

In order to accomplish the project, a high priority site plan for red tree voles (RTV) will be completed, and is part of the decision for this project. The RTV Plan will identify high-priority sites within the watershed; and will provide management direction to ensure RTV persistence and protection. This and future projects within the watershed would follow that guidance.

A project specific forest plan amendment is also likely to be needed to accomplish restoration actions within MS 14, Big Game Winter Range. This amendment would remove the requirement for thermal cover over 50 percent of 500-1000 acre analysis areas. Without this amendment, it would not be possible to achieve stand treatment objectives in the many off-site pine plantations in the Woodruff Flats area.

The substantive requirements from the 2012 Planning Rule under 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219.8 – 219.11 that are likely to apply to this project specific amendment are

*219.10(a)(1) Aesthetic values, air quality, cultural and heritage resources, ecosystem services, fish and wildlife species, forage, geologic features, grazing and rangelands, habitat and habitat connectivity, recreation settings and opportunities, riparian areas, scenery, soil, surface and subsurface water quality, timber, trails, vegetation, viewsheds, wilderness, and other relevant resources and uses.*

*219.10(a)(5) Habitat conditions, subject to the requirements of 219.9, for wildlife, fish, and plants commonly enjoyed and used by the public; for hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, observing, subsistence, and other activities (in collaboration with federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other Federal agencies, and State and local governments).*

The requirement for hiding cover will be retained, and the reduction of open road miles in this management strategy will benefit big game by reducing harassment and road traffic.

The objectives developed for the Stella Project are consistent with recommendations and direction presented in the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, the Rogue River Land and Resource Management Plan and Umpqua Land and Resource Management Plan as amended, and other national and regional guidance. The Stella Project area is covered under the Northwest Forest Plan. The Stella Project will be analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

#### **Land Management Allocations**

<b>Rogue River LRMP Management Strategy</b>	<b>Acres in Project Area</b>
MS-4 Developed Recreation	790
MS- 5 Special Interest Area	2625



MS-5 Huckleberry Special Interest Area	4736
MS- 6 Foreground Retention	693
MS-9 Middleground Partial Retention	439
MS-11 Scenic River	6614
MS-14 Big Game Winter Range	7984
MS-15 Old Growth	126
MS-16 Mature Habitat	243
MS- 20 Timber Suitable 1	8980
MS-21 Timber Suitable 2	215
MS-25 Research Natural Area	2556
MS 26 Restricted Riparian	4358
<b>Northwest Forest Plan Allocation</b>	
Riparian Reserve *overlaps other allocations	20,188
Late Successional Reserve	11,210
Matrix *overlays other allocations	30,973
Administratively Withdrawn	10,003
<b>Total Rogue River Project Acres</b>	<b>60,893</b>
<b>Umpqua LRMP Management Areas</b>	
MA-6 Special Interest Area	2139
Prescription A1-V Recreation Unroaded Concentration	1808
<b>Total Umpqua Acres</b>	<b>3947</b>
<b>Total Project Acres</b>	<b>64,840</b>

### Proposed Action

Proposed Activities	
Natural and Managed Stand Variable Density Thinning (may be commercial or non-commercial)	22,667 acres
Plantation Thinning	2,687 acres
Non-commercial Thinning	3,057 acres
Special Habitat and Wildlife restoration	13,016 acres
Prescribed Fire	10,560 acres
Roadside Shaded Fuel Break	1,750 acres
Culvert Replacement	15
Stream Restoration	42 miles
Woodruff Day Use and Natural Bridge Toilet Upgrade	3
OHV Trail Re-route	6 Miles
Rock Quarries to be expanded by ½ acre	8
Rock Quarries to be reclaimed	8
<b>Roads</b>	
Approximate number of road miles to be decommissioned	40 miles
Approximate number of road miles to be changed from ML 2 to ML 1	64 miles

Approximate number of road miles where maintenance level increases	9 miles
Approximate number of temporary roads needed for project implementation	15 miles

The primary silvicultural prescription proposed is variable density thinning. This type of treatment will meet the purpose and need by improving forest health, and reducing fire danger. Thinning of natural stands, managed stands, and plantations; along with application of prescribed fire would be the primary restoration actions for pines. Thinning in pure Douglas fir stands is aimed to diversify stand structure and accelerate the development of large trees in the future. Non-commercial thinning will improve the health of timber stands. The roadside shaded fuel break treatment will build upon existing shaded fuel breaks created during the 2017 fire season. They will create a logical position to manage a fire from.

Variable density thinning, prescribed fire, and/or directional falling will be used to improve the diversity and composition of plant species within the Riparian Reserve. The objective of these treatments will be to provide adequate temperature regulation, nutrient filtering, streambank stability, and a supply of coarse woody debris to channels.

The special habitat restoration will use primarily non-commercial mechanical treatment to restore a variety of different habitats. This includes huckleberry restoration, aspen restoration, meadow restoration, oak restoration, and legacy pine restoration. Some of this non-commercial work will occur in the Donegan Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) on the Umpqua portion of the project area.

Prescribed fire will be used in large blocks across the landscape to restore historic fire regimes within the project area. Prescribed fire will improve stand resiliency to future wildfire by increasing canopy height and reducing understory vegetation, surface fuel loading and density of small diameter vegetation during desired weather and fuel conditions. Reintroduction of fire across the landscape under ideal conditions will help restore historic ecological processes, restore forest structure and improve wildfire outcomes during future fire events.

Stream restoration in the project area will utilize large wood and rock placement in fish bearing streams to restore habitat. These structures improve the complexity and function of instream habitat. The culverts targeted for replacement will allow all life stages of aquatic organisms to pass. The current culverts in these locations do not allow this.

There are rock quarries within the project area that need to be expanded to keep allowing for a local source of rock material to maintain forest roads. There are also rock quarries within the project area that need to be reclaimed, because they no longer have a usable source of material. The remaining rock quarries within the project area will be maintained in their current condition.

The recreation proposals includes installing modern vault style outhouses at Woodruff Day Use area and Natural Bridge Campground. The existing outhouses at this popular day use site are cemented culverts that may not hold up over time, and could have a negative impact on water quality. The OHV Trail Re-route would take existing trail off mixed use 4 digit roads to increase safety for riders.

The proposed changes to road maintenance levels and decommissioning will make the current transportation system more sustainable. Many of these roads are currently being managed at a lower maintenance level on the ground, or are already part of the OHV Trail system. Some of these roads have already been identified as likely not needed in Subpart A of Travel Management. (36 CFR part 212, Subpart A). Roads changed to maintenance level 1 may be considered for a road to trail conversion for OHVs.



Your comments and feedback will help provide valuable information to the Stella IDT and can help identify additional issues and opportunities not previously identified. More information and PDF versions of maps are available on the project website at:

[http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=53241](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=53241)

Specific written comments, as defined by 36 CFR 218.2, should be within the scope of and have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official's consideration. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, transcripts, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for **30 calendar days** following publication of the NOI in the ***Federal Register***, which is expected to be published on May 11, 2018. The publication date of the NOI in the *Federal Register* is the exclusive means for calculating this comment period. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source than the *Federal Register*.

Only those who submit timely and specific written comments during a designated public comment period will have eligibility to file an objection (36 CFR §218.5). For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments must either sign the comment or verify identity upon request. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the requirements in §218.25(a) (3). Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not afford the Agency the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents, nor will those who submit anonymous comments have standing to object to the subsequent decision.

Please direct your comments on Stella to **David Palmer, District Ranger, High Cascades Ranger District, 47201 Highway 62, Prospect, OR 97536**. Hand delivery weekdays (except holidays) between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Comments can also be emailed to: [comments-pacificnorthwest-rogueriver-highcascades@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-rogueriver-highcascades@fs.fed.us), Fax # 541-560-3444. Please put "Stella Project" in the subject line or on the envelope.

For more information on the Stella Project or the NEPA process, contact Stella IDT Lead Anne Trapanese, Environmental Coordinator at (541) 560-3433 or [atrapanese@fs.fed.us](mailto:atrapanese@fs.fed.us). Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf may call the Federal Information Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,



DAVID M PALMER

*District Ranger*

**Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest**  
**High Cascades Ranger District**  
**Stella Planning Area**

Oregon

Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest

Stella Planning Area

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