

# FAQs/Questions and Answers

## **Topic: Chetco Bar Fire Area Salvage**

**Date: June 27, 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.

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.

An interdisciplinary team of experts designed and analyzed the Chetco Bar Fire Area Salvage project to ensure that impacts from the salvage would not create a significant impact to the forest resources or the human environment. Project design criteria are incorporated into this decision. This project will overlap with other work occurring in the area that is or has been developed and analyzed under other decisions. Specifically the Roadside Danger Tree Salvage project has overlap with this project in many areas. Providing for public and worker safety is the highest priority.

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.

The Chetco Bar Salvage EA project Decision Notice/ Environmental Assessment was signed by Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest Supervisor Merv George Jr on June 26, 2018.

## **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 71 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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## **FAQs/Questions and Answers - (continued)**

### **Why was alternative 2 chosen?**

Alternative 2 best met the need of the project to capture timber value in the matrix land allocations by harvesting dead, dying and/or damaged trees resulting from the 2017 Chetco Bar fire where timber harvest is a reasonable and expected land management activity.

The intent of this project is to expeditiously harvest fire-killed timber and dying trees resulting from the Chetco Bar fire and to recover the economic value in the timber prior to deterioration. With timely salvage, the value of the dead trees would pay for their removal from the forest and potentially pay for other future restoration treatments such as reforestation, road improvements, and other restoration type projects.

### **Why is the Forest Service proposing to salvage less than 2.5% percent of the Chetco Bar Fire area?**

There are a number of reasons that we are proposing to salvage less than 2% percent 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. In order to capture the value of trees that could be harvested in a timely manner, Alternative 2 impacts 2.5% of the Chetco Bar Fire footprint, with a rough estimate of 71 million board feet of proposed timber salvage harvest. Forest Service staff has worked with interested members of the public and with regulatory agencies to develop Alternative 2 and reduce impacts where there was a reasonable concern.

### **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.

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.

Originally Forest staff had identified approximately 13,500 acres in the Matrix land allocation that burned at higher severity and where salvage was a probable activity. Based on public input and field reconnaissance we have removed areas that were identified as likely important for the northern spotted owl and other species, in riparian reserves that were important to protect to minimize or prevent impacts to watershed function and for aquatic species, and to maintain important characteristics of the landscape. After all of the considerations to minimize impacts that have been made in the development of this project, Alternative 2 would treat up to 4,090 acres. Within those acres, additional retention of green trees and areas of snags important for wildlife use and visual resources would be retained. There is still a potential that the project may have impacts to forest resources including federally listed species such as the northern spotted owl due to impacts to post fire foraging habitat, however coordination and review with the fish and wildlife service have been conducted pursuant to the Endangered Species Act.

## **FAQs/Questions and Answers - (continued)**

### **Why didn't you treat more acres?**

It was key that we take a strategic approach to the Environmental Analysis if we wanted to capture any of the value of the burned timber. Much of the burned timber was in specially designated areas such as wilderness, or in other areas of environmental concern, such as spotted owl habitat. If we included areas of burned timber located in those areas, it would likely delay harvest of salvageable timber. Any delays would mean a loss in the economic value. A significant added benefit of implementing salvage is reducing the fuel loading that could mitigate the intensity of future wildfires.

### **Why didn't you treat less acres?**

Given the Forest Service's multiple use mandate to supply timber to local economies, it was important that we capture economic value of timber wherever feasible. Given the reason stated above, we chose to propose salvage harvest in select areas only where we could implement quickly, or in areas along roads where the burned trees were public hazards due to their proximity to travel corridors.

### **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?**

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.

### **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 value. An ESD is a procedure used for an environmental analysis or environmental impact statement to expedite planning efforts. The ESD was granted on June 21, 2018 by the Acting Chief of the Forest Service.

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